No. 1127
4 March –
17 March 2005
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PRIVATE EYE

QUEEN BUYS WEDDING PRESENT

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HUMBLED AND EMPOWERED"

"A FILM OF RARE COURAGE
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"AN EXTRAORDINARY PICTURE"

"PROFOUNDLY MOVING"

"...SUPERB"

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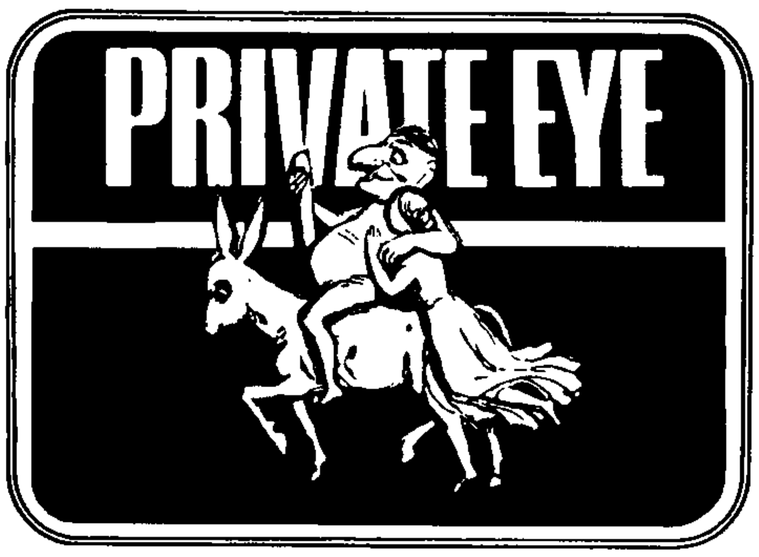
A FILM BY TERRY GEORGE

12A Contains moderate war images and strong language



BBC correspondent Gavin Hewitt has collected a hefty serial fee from the *Mail on Sunday* and won acres of publicity for his forthcoming autobiography by revealing what Prince Charles told him in an off-the-record interview.

Hewitt's colleagues are not entirely delighted, however. They fear that no one will ever speak off-the-record to a BBC hack again if the source thinks the supposedly confidential chat will eventually be published and attributed. Some say Hewitt should be disciplined, or perhaps even sacked.

In 2003 the self-same Gavin Hewitt gave evidence to the Hutton inquiry about his interview with Dr David Kelly a few hours after Andrew Gilligan's notorious broadcast. The relevant passage in his Hutton examination went like this:

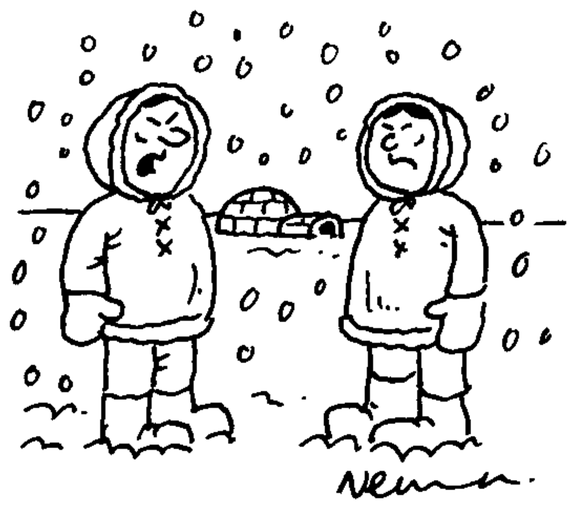
Q: *Did you explain at the beginning of the conversation the basis on which you were asking [Kelly] to talk to you?*

Hewitt: *Yes, I did. I said it was an off-the-record conversation; I was going to talk on a confidential basis to him.*

Q: *Can I ask you to clarify what is exactly meant by an "off the record" conversation? What are the practical consequences of that?*

Hewitt: *What I meant by that, and he did not question this, was that I would be able to quote what he said but I would not be able to name him, so that his name would not be brought in in any subsequent report I did.*

Just so: why betray your off-the-record source in a TV report when you can earn far more by exposing him in a book instead?



"Commuters have 70 words for 'cancellation'"

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ABC

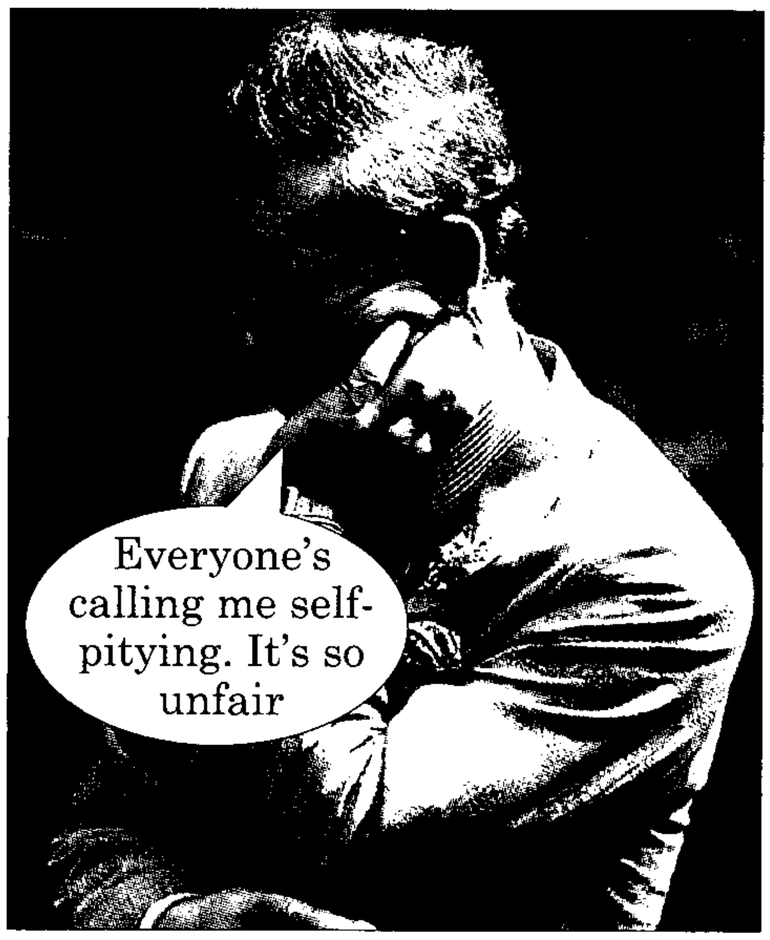
HOW to explain the colossal, exponentially rising profits of high street banks like HSBC and Barclays?

The most humbug has come from Barclays chief executive John Varley, boasting of the £1.3bn his bank has paid in tax. "Just imagine how many hospitals and schools you could build for that," he says.

His bank's effective tax rate, according to its results announcement, is around 27 percent – significantly lower than the official tax rates for company profits in the countries where it makes its profits (mainly the UK and US). Much of the difference is explained by artificial dodges of the sort the *Eye* has regularly reported, which generate hundreds of millions of pounds in tax savings.

So the real answer to Varley's invitation to speculate on how many hospitals and schools his tax bill provides is "many fewer than it should".

● More Bankers, page 9



CHRISTINE Wheatley was dropped from a shortlist of Labour candidates last week after mentioning to a journalist that as a penniless student in Paris many years ago she accepted money for sex.

"The Labour party have had no choice but to withdraw her from the shortlist of aspiring candidates," a party spokesman announced sternly. But is a stint in prostitution necessarily a bar to political advancement?

Perhaps Labour has forgotten the case of a male party member who had a remarkably similar French interlude in his wild youth. Interviewed by the *Sun* in May 1980 under the headline "Wanted – Men For Hire", this happy hooker boasted that he earned up to £250 a night as a professional gigolo on the French Riviera. The main drawback was that husbands sometimes came home unexpectedly while he was pleasuring their wives.

"But think of the advantages – you choose your own hours, have a high standard of living, no ties, and all your clients are upper class, rich and civilised. It's never hard work, but the women do expect a high standard of performance."

Will Alastair Campbell (for it was he) now intervene to plead for Christine Wheatley's reinstatement?

WHAT news of Mapeley, the tax haven-based outfit that was allowed to buy the offices of Britain's Inland Revenue and Customs?

Last year's national audit office (NAO) report on STEPS, the disastrous private finance initiative deal under which the sale was made, ducked all the big questions.

Instead of asking why the deal was costing hundreds of millions more than it should have done, for example, the NAO simply repeated the self-serving explanations given by the company and the government.

One of the more incredible reassurances accepted by the NAO was that, although Mapeley expected minimal profits (because it had under-priced its bid), the high level of investment from the company's backers "helped to tie in the shareholders and reinforced their commitment to the deal".

The impression of there being loyal investors who were in it for the long haul was further reinforced by the promise on Mapeley's website that "Mapeley is fortunate to be backed by three substantial shareholders, committed over the long term: Soros Real Estate Partners, Fortress Investment Group and Delancey Estates".

So what's happened? By last November, three and a half years into the 20-year contract, Delancey had sold up to the other two. A month later, with negotiations for more money rumbling on, the Soros fund also jumped ship and sold its 50 percent to Fortress. Neither development was trumpeted by Mapeley, although the changes were reflected in its web message, which now assures potential customers that "Mapeley is fortunate to be backed by a substantial shareholder" who is "committed over the long term".

Hm. The remaining owner, Fortress, is now reported to be honouring its long term commitment by looking to… sell Mapeley on the stock market!

LAST Saturday's *Daily Telegraph* magazine carried a long article about the evils of "the casino culture". It gave a harrowing account of the wretched, debt-ridden existence that most punters have in the US – and that the UK is now about to replicate with the passing of the gaming bill.

Alas! The paper apparently forgot that its own proprietors, the Barclay twins, derive much of their fortune from the casino culture. Just weeks before the piece came out, subscribers to the *Telegraph* online service were bombarded with special offers from "Ritz Casino online", a spin-off from the hugely profitable Ritz Hotel casino, which is owned by the Barclays.

It seems a safe bet that no further pieces about the evils of gambling will appear in the *Telegraph*.

IN A *Daily Mail* interview promoting his new book, Piers "Morgan" Moron is asked if he's hypocritical in refusing to discuss his own private life while gleefully exposing everyone else's.

"It's not that at all," he says. "I've got no problem with people scrutinising my life."

This may come as a surprise to *Times* writer Andrew Pierce. When Pierce asked about Moron's liaison with *Guardian* diarist Marina Hyde, Piers warned him: "You're invading my privacy, you cunt, and I'll invade yours if you write about that."

LABOUR'S shiny new slogan "Forwards not Backwards" has a familiar ring to it… to residents of the former East Germany.

"Vorwärts immer, rückwärts nimmer!", was the catchphrase of East German leader Erich Honecker, the man who built the Berlin wall; and disillusioned *Ossies* used to quote it ironically as their country collapsed into economic ruin. Germans still use it today to send each other up.

IRA EMBARRASSMENT

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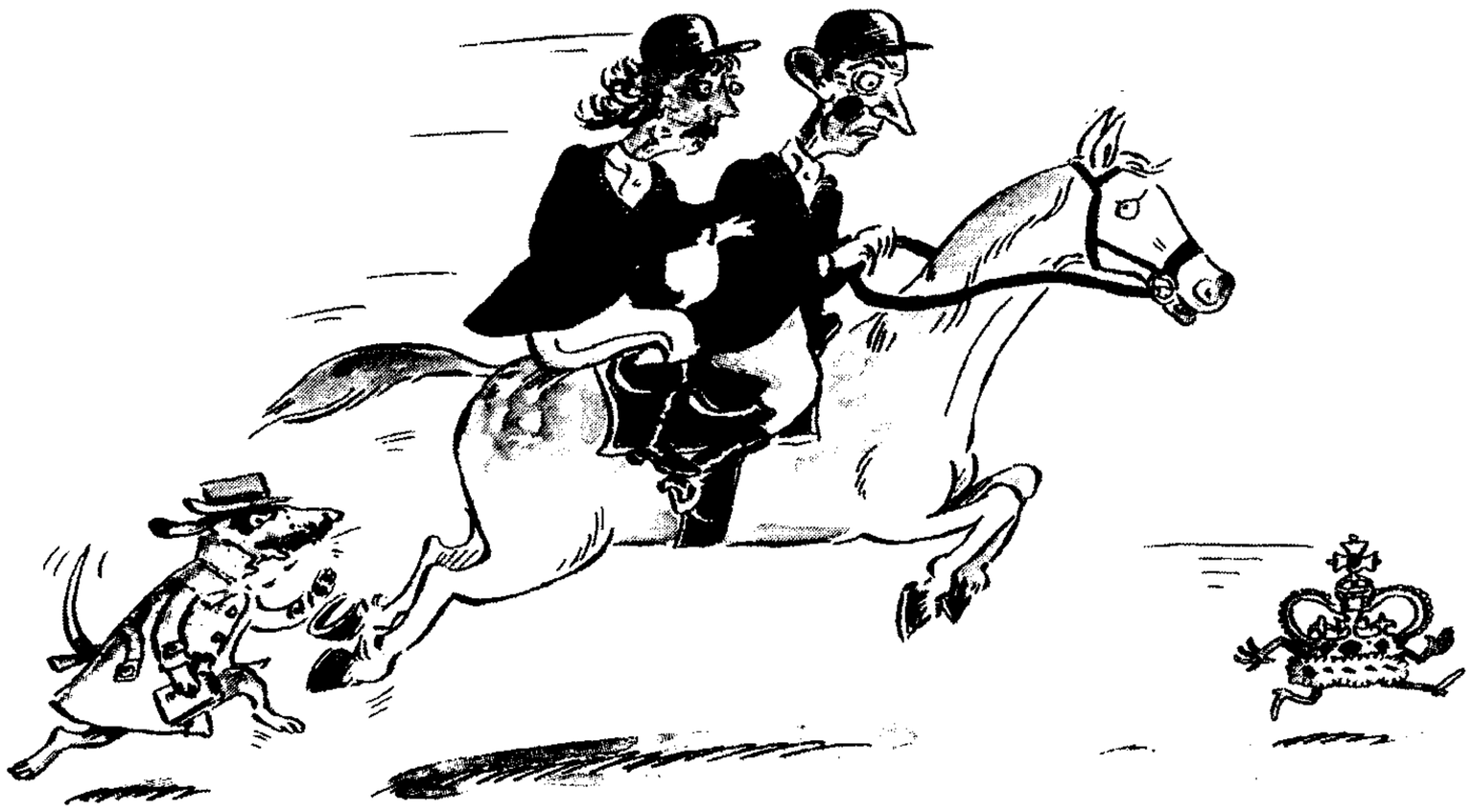


STREET OF SHAME

PIERS Morgan promises that his diaries, published on 10 March, will depict him as he is – "a cocky little git… sanctimonious, self-important and hypocritical". The highlights being published in this week's *Daily Mail* are certainly doing a fine job.

The book returns to the topic of what Morgan insisted in November 1999 was "the scoop of the millennium": news that Cherie Blair was pregnant. When Number Ten issued a general press statement to spoil the *Mirror*'s exclusive, Morgan erupted into print to denounce this chicanery, insisting that he had been "pursuing it quietly" for more than a week following an anonymous tip-off and that PR man Max Clifford – who was also attempting to take the credit for the tale – had had very little to do with it.

"We're not talking a big buy-up here," Morgan told the *Guardian* at the time, insisting that his anonymous source would receive less than £10,000, and all Clifford stood to gain was "a nice Christmas dinner" for providing a few extra details later on. "It will suit some people's needs that it was a huge buy-up but it was not. We have got away with a great scoop."

His diaries, however, tell a different tale. "Cherie is pregnant at 45," reads the entry for 18 November. "We bought this extraordinary scoop from Max Clifford for a fee not far off £50,000."

THE serialisation of Piers Morgan's diaries in the big-paying *Daily Mail* will have come as a relief to his publisher, Ebury Press, which splashed out an inexplicable £1.2m for the book and cannot, after the flop of similar memoirs by Greg Dyke, Jon Snow and Rageh Omaar, expect to make anything like that back in sales.

But what can the paper hope to gain from the deal? Rumours are circulating that the *Mail* group's interests in Morgan are much closer to home: that he is being groomed for a new role as editor of its London paper the *Evening Standard*, replacing the hapless Veronica Wadley (who already employs him as a columnist). There is, however, a strong possibility these rumours originate from Morgan himself – not least because as an editor he was even less successful than Wadley, losing the *Mirror* even more readers than she managed to jettison from the *Standard* last year.

"I HOPE Leslie Ash wins her rehabilitation fight and gets back on TV soon – sticking a splendid two fingers up at everyone who's so cruelly revelled in her many misfortunes." Thus Piers "Morgan" Moron in the London *Evening Standard* last week.

Who are these cruel revellers? Clearly he can't be referring to a certain editor of the *Daily Mirror* who in 2003 sneered that Leslie Ash's lips had "set the cosmetic surgery industry back 50 years", and warned her not to sit too close to the fire in case she melted.

AS THE *Observer* reported before the Livingstone-*Standard* furore blew up, the London Olympics bid had already lost significant ground to Paris. At the end of January, it published a front-page piece by sports hack Denis Campbell stating that the capital's chances of hosting the Games were effectively dead in the water. Then all hell broke loose.

Shortly after his article appeared, Campbell was summoned to the House of Commons for a meeting with sports minister Richard Caborn who proceeded to lecture him on what he considered the faults in his report. Caborn's parting shot was that if, in July, London was acclaimed as the successful bidder, he would be writing to Campbell's editor telling him to hire another reporter.

The *Observer*'s climbdown was instant and grovellingly contrite. First, campaign organiser Seb Coe was given space to rebut Campbell's article. Then the paper's profile page was given over to a long, complimentary portrait of Coe with no mention of his messy private life.

MORE than one million people tuned in to BBC2 on Valentine's night to watch *The Sun Says Sorry*, a documentary following *Sun* managing executive Graham Dudman to Liverpool where he attempted to apologise for his paper's coverage of the Hillsborough disaster in 1989.

Around 1.1m viewers saw members of the Hillsborough Family Support Group voting not even to grant him an audience, let alone accept his apology. But curiously, staff at the paper itself appeared to have watched a different documentary – one in which the apology was whole-heartedly welcomed.

"Two leading members of the Hillsborough Family Support Group – set up after the soccer stadium disaster – yesterday publicly accepted *The Sun*'s apology for mistakes in an article 16 years ago," the paper reported the morning after the programme. "They told Radio Merseyside they accepted *The Sun*'s apology for causing hurt and pain."

Naturally it was only lack of space which meant that the official response of the rest of the support group went unrecorded in the paper – as did the dozens of other calls the station had received, the vast majority suggesting exactly where the *Sun* could stick its contrition.

THE righteous *Daily Mail* is sinking under a tidal wave of verbal filth thanks to its editor Paul Dacre and his penchant for profanity.

Shortly before Christmas Dacre encountered Andrew Yates, one of the paper's commissioning editors, as he was going to a lunch for 20 or so of the rag's regular feature writers. "I hope you fucking puke your guts out," said Dacre cheerily.

More recently, when Yates was being balled out by his editor for some footling blunder, Dacre asked him scornfully: "What are you, Yates?" Yates, who still resembles a mischievous prep school boy, was quick to reply: "I'm a cunt, sir."

"No you're not," Dacre corrected him. "You're a fucking cunt."

Dacre, whose paper bemoans the coarsening of British culture almost as often as it predicts a crash in house prices, is so prodigal in his use of the c-word that editorial conferences are now known among staff as "the Vagina Monologues". A typical greeting of one *Daily Mail* hack by another now goes as follows: "I say, have you been double-cunted yet?"

Translator's note: This is Mailspeak for: "Have you been called a cunt by the editor twice in the same sentence?"

HOW JOURNALISM WORKS

4 October 2004: The *News of the World* reports claims by Jodie Marsh that she enjoyed "steamy encounters" with footballer Frank Lampard and has the photos to prove it.

13 February 2005: Frank Lampard begins an exclusive deal to write for the *News of the World*.

13 February 2005: The *News of the World* publishes a correction to its story of 4 October 2004. "Mr Lampard has asked us to make clear he denies [these allegations]. We are happy to do this and to clarify that there are no explicit Polaroids of the alleged encounters."

Number Crunching

£100,000,000

■ Estimated cost to food industry of recall of products which may contain Sudan 1 food dye

1,000,000

■ Number of affected products a consumer would have to eat to ingest more than a gram of Sudan 1

COULD this be what inspired Robert Kilroy-Silk to call his new party Veritas? As Kilroy may have noticed on his trips to Brussels, Veritas also happens to be the name of a Belgian retail chain selling stockings and other female "accessories".

Readers of P.G. Wodehouse will instantly think of Sir Roderick Spode, another self-styled Man of Destiny. The guilty secret of this noisy demagogue is that he owns a shop selling… ladies' lingerie.

This latest discovery confirms the startling resemblance between Kilroy and Spode. As Bertie Wooster tells the Man of Destiny, when he finally plucks up the courage to confront him: "The trouble with you, Spode, is that just because you have succeeded in inducing a handful of half-wits to disfigure the London scene… you think you're someone. You hear them shouting, 'Heil, Spode!' and you imagine it is the Voice of the People. That is where you make your bloomer. What the Voice of the People is saying is: 'Look at that frightful ass Spode swanking about…! Did you ever in your puff see such a perfect perisher?'"

DIRTY DES SPECIAL

NO SOONER had the last *Eye* gone to press than New York mobster Richard Martino, aka "Richie from the Bronx", pleaded guilty to running an internet porn scam and, separately, conspiring to extort money from Richard "Dirty" Desmond, aka Richie of the Bonks.

Our story about Martino and Desmond was followed up at length by most national papers – but, surprise surprise, not a word appeared in the *Daily Express* and *Daily Star* (prop: Dirty Des). Infuriated that even the *Mail* had broken its pact of silence by reporting this sleazy tale, the *Express* retaliated with yet another article about Lord Rothermere's pro-fascist record in the 1930s.

Had the trial gone ahead, the court would have heard evidence from Desmond's former lieutenant Philip Bailey, who was kidnapped while visiting New York in October 1992 on behalf of Dirty Des. A gang of mafia hoodlums pistol-whipped him, slashed his face and applied a Taser-style electric prod to his testicles. "We want our money back," they yelled. "You tell your fucking boss…"

The money in question was more than $1m which Martino and his associate Norman Chanes had spent advertising phone-porn services in Desmond's "adult magazines". They eventually concluded that he was ripping them off by producing vastly inflated circulation figures for the mags; indeed they suspected that some of the mags didn't exist. Only two weeks before Bailey's trip to New York, Martino and Chanes confronted Desmond in a London hotel to demand repayment in full, but he refused. As Martino later told Chanes, the subsequent assault on Bailey was intended "to give him a message for his boss".

With his guilty plea two weeks ago, Martino admitted to demanding money from Desmond and arranging for Bailey to be beaten up. Sentencing isn't due until May, but he faces up to 10 years in jail as well as forfeiting assets worth $15m. Yet Dirty Des's spokesman continues to insist that Desmond never met Martino or had any dealings with him, and that Bailey's account of his ordeal in New York was "a fantasy".

If true, this would mean that Richie from the Bronx has willingly incurred a jail term by confessing to a crime he didn't commit – a crime, in fact, that never took place at all. Does Dirty Des really expect anyone to believe this nonsense? Does he even believe it himself?

A SPAT involving Associated Newspapers is just too good an opportunity for Richard Desmond to pass over, particularly when the other party involved is his new best friend Ken Livingstone, whom he escorted to the recent Bafta awards. So it was all too predictable that the *Express* should wade in to condemn what it described as the *Mail*'s hypocrisy in the affair.

"The Nazi-supporting past of Associated Newspapers, owner of the *Daily Mail*, was back in the spotlight yesterday as new evidence emerged of its links with Adolf Hitler," it raged. Of course, there was no new evidence – just the old familiar story. The *Express* followed this up with the "revelation" that *Mail* executives had adopted a Nazi theme for a fancy-dress party held in honour of departing editor Sir David English (see *Eyes passim*).

If the *Express* is revolted by such an insouciant attitude towards the Third Reich, will it soon inveigh against a certain porn-merchant turned press-baron who goose-stepped, performed Nazi salutes and imitated Hitler during a meeting last April? Er, no.

THE other motive behind the *Express*'s partisan coverage of Red Ken's spat was, of course, financial.

"Mr Livingstone has a deeply felt opposition to the *Standard*'s monopoly as the only evening paper in London," it noted. "Last month he backed moves which will sweep aside the paper's grip on the market and ensure competition, giving Londoners a wider choice of evening papers. Associated Newspapers pays for the exclusive right to distribute free papers across the capital's Tube network – a deal negotiated with London Underground. Express Newspapers has challenged the monopoly and has offered a deal worth 12 times as much – worth tens of millions of pounds more to Londoners than the Associated contract."

Really? Associated pays London Underground just over £1m a year for its distribution rights across five years. So Desmond appears to be saying that he will pay £60m in the same period. Back in 2003, however, he told the *Sunday Express* that his new publication "will not be tied to a £6m distribution contract with transport authorities". Before the love-in with Dirty Des progresses beyond the heavy-petting stage, perhaps Ken should – like all good tarts – ask for money up-front.

HACKWATCH

Richard Kay

RICHARD KAY succeeded Nigel Dumpster as the *Daily Mail*'s diarist in 2003, mainly because of his alleged royal contacts. But his expertise has proved rather shaky now that his best source, Princess Diana, is no longer available to guide him.

"It will be fascinating to assess the warmth displayed by the Queen and Prince Philip at Windsor Castle on 8 April," he wrote on 11 February, the day after Prince Charles's engagement was announced. "It will be one of those occasions which the royals are good at pulling off spectacularly."

Whoops! On 22 February he tried to regain the initiative by claiming that the switch to a register office was actually a cunning wheeze to show Charles's "common touch". The Queen, he added, "thinks it is an excellent idea… The relationship between the prince and his mother has never been better than it is now." When the Queen then let it be known that she would boycott this "excellent" ceremony, Kay changed course again. "There is, I can reveal today, a strained and painful background to the Queen's extraordinary snub," he wrote on 23 February. There had been "years of conflict between the prince and his mother" because Her Majesty disapproved of "that woman". Shock, horror! Note particularly the words "I can reveal", applied to a fact that the entire country has known for, well, yonks.

Still, however useless his royal stories are these days, there's no doubt that Richard Kay's diary is delivering other scoops at an astonishing rate. He has used the phrase "I can reveal" 178 times over the past year, and here are a few recent revelations of which even Dumpster himself would be proud:

2 December 2004: After several months of living together in a rented flat, former It-girl Tamara Beckwith and her beau, Italian construction heir Giorgio Veroni, are buying a house in Chelsea. "It's a very happy situation," Giorgio confirms to the diarist.

10 December: Kay has exciting news of former *Castaway* participant Ben Fogle, 30: "I can reveal he is no longer single." Fogle is dating Heathfield-educated Marina Hunt, 26. "They are absolutely perfect for each other," a friend confides. "Marina's absolutely gorgeous, loves the countryside and even has a labrador called Maggie, which gets on very well with Ben's labrador Inca."

20 December: Landowner the Earl of St Germans is engaged to magazine journalist Catherine Wilson, Kay reveals dramatically. "Yes – we're engaged," Wilson confirms. "We're both very happy, but I don't really want to talk about it too much." From other sources, however, Kay is able to confirm the rumour that "friends are delighted".

24 December: Jeweller Harry Collins, who repairs the Queen's baubles, has received the "ultimate accolade for his work" – a royal warrant. Collins is thrilled. "I got a letter from the Palace completely out of the blue," he discloses.

5 January 2005: Stirling Moss has suffered from back pain for several years but now, Kay can reveal, he has had two operations. "I am delighted to say the pain is very much better," Moss admits. But Kay has less happy news about Jodie Kidd's *fiancé* Aidan Butler: the 27-year-old internet entrepreneur has suffered a knee injury in the French Alps on the first day of a skiing holiday. "When you fall down, normally the skis release from your boots," a friend explains. "Unfortunately for Aidan, the mechanism wasn't working properly and so the skis failed to release, wrenching his knee."

11 January: Socialite Plum Sykes is shopping for a wedding gown following her engagement to handsome millionaire Toby Rowland, 34. "I'm really pleased," says Toby's mother, "and I'm sure they'll be very happy together." Toby himself confesses to Kay that "we're thrilled".

14 January: After a whirlwind seven-month romance, 30-year-old Zoe Tryon is to tie the knot with ruggedly handsome Australian ex-paratrooper Bradley Trevor Greive. "The family is absolutely thrilled for Zoe," her father, Lord Tryon, admits from his home in Perthshire, "and we all think Bradley is a smashing chap."

24 January: Kay reveals an "astonishing piece of bad luck" for Patty Palmer-Tomkinson, mother of socialite Tara: she has broken a leg while skiing in Switzerland. "Despite having to spend the next three months on crutches, Patty, who has been married to landowner Charles Palmer-Tomkinson for 38 years, is surprisingly unbowed," he adds.

27 January: There is new happiness in the life of the divorced Marquess of Londonderry, Kay can reveal: he has become close to the widowed Countess of Iveagh. "We are good friends," the 67-year-old marquess confirms.

3 February: Today's big question: "Is spirited Lady Dalmeny about to present her husband with a son and heir?" Caroline, 35, has already borne Lord Dalmeny four daughters, including triplets. "Caroline is pregnant again so this will be her fifth," Lord Dalmeny's father, the Earl of Rosebery, explains helpfully. "It would be nice if it was a boy, obviously, but one can't help these things."

17 February: Anthea Turner has broken her ankle while skiing in the Swiss Alps with her husband Grant Bovey. "She can't walk properly," a friend discloses, "but is hoping that she'll be discharged from hospital in time to fly back with Grant and his daughters on Saturday."

18 February: Pregnant model-turned-actress Lisa B is remaining at home in London while her husband, property developer Robert Anton, takes a skiing trip with the two children from his first marriage. But according to Lisa, 32, Anton has suffered "a nasty fall on the slopes", which means he can't ski for the rest of the holiday.

23 February: Following the wedding of high society beauty entrepreneur Heather Bird and property tycoon Robert Tchenguiz, Kay discloses sensationally that the happy couple have gone skiing in Switzerland for their honeymoon. Whether either has yet sprained an ankle or broken a leg is, alas, something even he cannot reveal.

QUEEN LAYS ON ROYAL RECEPTION

IN THE TEAROOM

SO who will be chancellor after the general election if, as tipped, Gordon Brown goes to the foreign office or stomps off in a sulk to form an inner-party opposition?

The rumour mill is no way to predict the political future accurately, but it's a good guide to who's building a strong parliamentary base. On that basis it's safe to say: forget Patricia Hewitt. No one but no one is talking about her in this context any more.

Peter Hain, in the past always one of his own biggest fans in these matters, has picked up a few acolytes; and the Brownites like to talk up Alistair Darling. But until last week it was Alan Milburn who clearly had the highest rumour count.

This was odd given that Milburn has no permanent friends, only interests; his boosters being really just Mr Tony's partisans. And his stock then flew south after the Brown camp put the boot in over his pisspoor management of the election campaign.

Moreover, even if Milburn were to prevail come 6 May, he might find he has nothing to do in his new job. Back in 1998 when he first turned up at the treasury as a newly-appointed chief secretary hunting for his office, Gordon – who'd spotted him as a Mr Tony nark – told him he wouldn't need a desk as there was nothing for him to do now the two-year public spending plan was done and dusted. Now Gordon is at it again. Tax and spending plans are set until 2008; and in this month's budget Gordon will probably extend that until the end of the decade. So whoever succeeds him will have plenty of time on their hands...

'Quintus Slide'

DOWNING Street was not happy to learn of pressure from "wor friends in the North" to make the safe Bishop Auckland seat an "open selection" (ie for both male and female candidates) after the sitting MP Derek Foster decided late in the day to "retire" (see last *Eye*).

Nor was Liz Lloyd, the Downing Street policy unit wonk and Tony Blair speech writer, who has developed a sudden interest in north-east politics. Now the seat has been declared a "wimmin only shortlist", it should be plain sailing for Lloyd as local fixers get to work.

The only possible cloud on the horizon is that the former MEP Mo O'Toole has also developed an affection for Bishop Auckland. Known as "Dr Dolittle" by former colleagues in Brussels, Mo will have to be kept on the shortlist for the good reason that she was once married to another local MP, Alan "Onion Balls" Milburn, now Labour's election campaign supreme. For reasons best known to him, "Onion Balls" has always been reluctant to get in the way of his ex-wife's towering ambition.

PS: Peter Mandelson's former little helper, Patrick Diamond, is less than happy at this turn of events. But help may soon be at hand! Middlesbrough MP, Church of England commissioner and tacky porn writer Stuart Bell may be on the verge of helpfully announcing his retirement. Should Bell depart – most likely for the Lords – he will join an ever-growing band of MPs whose "late retirements" are clearing the way for a host of Blairite special advisers. So far Tony Banks, Helen Jackson, Jean Corston, Jack Cunningham, Kevin Hughes and last week the Plymouth MP and transport minister David Jamieson, have all announced they are to stand down.

WESTMINSTER insiders had been expecting two Tory defections to Labour in the run-up to the election: Wantage MP and former education minister Robert Jackson, who has made the leap; and, it was rumoured, the increasingly circumspect and moderate sounding Buckingham MP John Bercow, who is still a Tory.

Bercow has come a long way since his ranting Federation of Conservative Students days, although he earned the undying gratitude of party chiefs by subsequently turning "Queen's evidence" over the antics of some of his even madder Young Tory mates. Bercow has vigorously denied any plan to defect to Labour; but that hasn't stopped speculation that he is simply waiting to see the size of the Dear Leader's majority before he finally makes up his mind.

AS predicted by the *Eye*, Jessica Morden, general-secretary of the Wales Labour party, has been selected to fight the safe Labour seat of Newport East for the party.

Asked by the *Western Mail* where she stood on the Iraq war, she demonstrated the sort of political savvy that could take her to the top of "new" Labour. "I have worked closely with Ann Clwyd [the PM's special envoy to Iraq]," said Morden, side-stepping the question. "I have spoken to exiled Iraqis who have given me first hand accounts of the country under Saddam. The important thing now is to help rebuild the country and it was marvellous to see a turnout of 58 percent in the Iraqi elections despite the intimidation".

JACK Cunningham's pal and business partner, Iain Malcolm, has decided not to throw his hat in the ring for his master's seat of Copeland in Cumbria.

Malcolm, a lobbyist with Sovereign Strategy (where Cunningham is an executive board member), has decided Labour's 4,500 majority may disappear after the election and has again fixed his beady eye on the South Shields seat occupied by education minister David Miliband.

The hard-nosed Malcolm was blocked from the shortlist of candidates after Tony Blair intervened to secure the seat for his protégé. But Malcolm and his other boss, Sovereign Strategy chairman Alan Donnelly, have never forgiven party bosses for parachuting Miliband into their manor back in 1997. Both are keenly aware that if things go badly for the government, the less than streetwise Miliband could be a candidate for deselection in the next round.

STRAW SIKHS VOTES

"How are we getting on?"

UKIP appears to be in a state of confusion about whether it approves of alleged fraudsters or not.

The party took a very stern line against Ashley Mote, one of the party's 12 MEPs elected last June, when it discovered that he was facing charges of housing benefit fraud (which have yet to be heard and which Mote denies vigorously). An MEP for the South-east, he had the UKIP whip withdrawn and his party membership suspended. He now sits as an independent.

However, while beholding this, er, Mote, UKIP appears not to be considering a whacking great beam in the form of its parliamentary candidate for Manchester Central, Damien O'Connor.

A former Manchester city councillor, O'Connor left the Labour party in disgrace after being convicted of a £9,000 housing benefit fraud in 2000. He clung on to his council seat as a member of the "Independent Progressive Labour Party" (membership: one D. O'Connor) but was duly kicked out by the voters at the local elections in 2003, when his Newton Heath seat reverted to Labour.

Why UKIP imagines the Manchester electorate would wish to vote for this crook, having already rejected him once, is a mystery.

AT a recent Commons meeting of Compass, the Labour pressure group set up by Neal Lawson, former Blair adviser and founding lobbyist of LLM Communications, there was an awkward moment for one speaker on "choice" in the public services.

A questioner asked Ian Parker, head of strategic communications at the New Local Government Network, an advocate of privatisation with close links to "new" Labour, to say – in the interests of transparency and accountability – from what source he and his NLGN colleagues received their monthly cheques.

Lawson cut in to suggest the questioner might like to have a quiet word with Parker *after* the meeting. Parker said the same; but when pressed told the audience that the information was on the NLGN website.

Sadly, no such information seems to exist on the NLGN site – nor for that matter is there any accounts or list of donors. All one finds are the logos of "corporate partners" including leading privatisers Onyx, Capita and Nord Anglia.

Number Crunching

£13,000

■ Minimum wage for privates in British army serving in Iraq following public sector pay review last week

£133,000

■ Minimum wage for Geoff Hoon, defence secretary, following public sector pay review last week

BANKERS

THE office of fair trading (OFT) has designated February "scam awareness" month. How unfortunate that last week the government body set up to ensure fair play should itself be accused of presiding over perhaps the most lucrative scam in the country – the banks' hugely profitable stranglehold on moving money around.

As the major British banks report yet more record profits, the man who led a review of their operations for the chancellor five years ago, Don Cruickshank, has complained loudly that his recommendation to regulate the way the banks handle customers' money has been ignored, despite Gordon Brown having endorsed his report at the time.

Cruickshank reckoned the banks' over-charging on handling money rips off customers by £5bn each year. After three years' procrastination, however, in 2003 the chancellor quietly dropped the idea of regulation in favour of a "taskforce" within the OFT, which has held several meetings but introduced no new rules. As 11 of its 16 members are themselves bankers, this isn't perhaps surprising.

Cruickshank blames treasury mandarins for the chancellor's climbdown, pointing out that the official responsible for government policy on regulation when he wrote his report, Sir Steve Robson, has since moved on to the board of the Royal Bank of Scotland. (He mustn't be too hopeful of a change in policy following the departure of Robson, whose job in the treasury is now held by James Sassoon, a career banker *before* taking the job.)

FOOTBALL NEWS

WITH the transfer of Chelsea football club to Roman Abramovich still under investigation by the financial services authority (FSA) and the club racking up huge losses, fans might have been reassured to learn that the company has appointed a new auditor to make sure its finances are all above aboard.

The winner of the lucrative contract was accountancy firm KPMG, which already provides tax advice to the club and is very well connected to the club's new Russian owner. Abramovich's right hand man is former chartered accountant Eugene Tenenbaum, who just happened to be in charge of KPMG's Russian operations in the 1990s. He is now finance director of Chelsea FC, a director of various companies through which the former oligarch controls the club and runs Abramovich's private asset management company, Millhouse Ltd.

The appointment of KPMG coincides with new guidelines on auditor independence from the government's auditing practices board. One of the major threats identified is where a firm audits its own work, such as tax advice, and where a former senior member of the audit firm is in a position of influence in the company being audited, especially where there is any risk of the accountants being intimidated.

FALSE ECONOMY

HAS the audit commission taken its "minimising bureaucracy" slogan too much to heart? Its announcement of £18m savings means it has halved its own budget since 2001.

The move will mean fewer and shorter inspections of public bodies, like local councils and police forces; and, not surprisingly, most such bodies are chuffed at the prospect. But can they really do without inspection?

OUTSOURCING NEWS

CAN nothing dissuade public sector bodies in Britain from hiring EDS, the catastrophe-prone American IT firm?

The Metropolitan police has just shortlisted the EDS-led metAgility consortium and rivals Capgemini to fight it out for a £650m mega-contract to combine several of the Met's IT systems. EDS may look like a good bet to the Met since it already runs the £60m crime reporting system, one of the contracts the force wants to consolidate in the deal. But does the Met know nothing of EDS's track record?

Last November EDS IT systems at the department of work and pensions suffered the biggest crash in UK history with 80,000 terminals failing, causing several days' delay to many benefit payments. The same month the work and pensions select committee deemed the EDS-run Child Support Agency IT system "badly designed, badly tested and badly implemented".

And let's not forget the Inland Revenue IT contract which resulted in disaster for the introduction of tax credits.

WEST YORKSHIRE POLICE
Chapeltown Division
Helping to build a Safe, Just and West Yorkshire

THREE months ago the public accounts committee (PAC) found that the public private finance deal under which Capita runs the criminal records bureau (CRB) was "not yet providing the standard or range of services originally envisaged". Things had to change and so they have: Capita has *cut* the services offered by the CRB.

In September 2002, a few months after Capita won the contract, a review by Patrick Carter, the founder of private health company Westminster Healthcare who was made a Labour peer last year, concluded that the number of bodies registered with the CRB should be "optimised to establish sensible economies of scale and improve proficiency" – ie they should be cut.

This meant that only organisations of a certain size would be able to go direct to the CRB for police clearance for staff and volunteers who wanted to work for them. Other groups, such as small clubs and charities, would have to go through larger "umbrella" bodies that are registered with the CRB but whose fees are often pretty steep. Recognising the burden this would be for small establishments, the then home secretary David Blunkett promised to look at putting a cap on fees.

Now home office minister Paul Goggins has announced that Carter's cuts will be imposed "subject to a formal consultation process", but with no mention of any of the safeguards offered by Blunkett. The CRB itself makes the position clearer, dismissing any idea of help for smaller organisations by declaring that the fees umbrella bodies charge are matters for them.

The whole idea behind the CRB was to centralise the criminal vetting of people working with children and other vulnerable people. In the interests of "economies of scale", much of the work will now be pressed on to scores of other bodies which the CRB hopes will develop the capacity for it. In the process – entirely fortuitously of course – Crapita will make even more profit out of running the CRB.

Post Offices to be shit in Southport are: Woodvale, Heathfield Road (Ainsdale), Marshside Road, Hillside and Lord Street South.

Southport Visitor

Down On The Farm

THE mass-panic over Sudan 1 has led to the largest food product recall in UK history. Yet the quantities of this red dye used in the £100m-worth of products taken off Britain's shelves are so minute that the risk of them causing cancer is admitted to be very small indeed.

However, this has not prevented the Food Standards Agency, backed by the EU, going into overdrive, threatening shopkeepers with two years in prison unless these deadly products are removed immediately. Puzzled by this reaction has been pesticides campaigner Georgina Downs, who for three years has been battling to expose the government's curious reluctance to protect the public against the reckless spraying of toxic chemicals.

Ms Downs has presented the government's advisory committee on pesticides (ACP) with a mountain of scientific evidence linking crop sprays with cancers of all kinds. Yet the ACP waves this aside as irrelevant – and the minister, Alun Michael, stoutly persists in maintaining he is not aware of any "evidence".

The explanation, alas, is simple. Unlike Sudan 1, the pesticides are all licensed as safe to use by er... the government itself, through its pesticides safety directorate.

'Muckspreader'

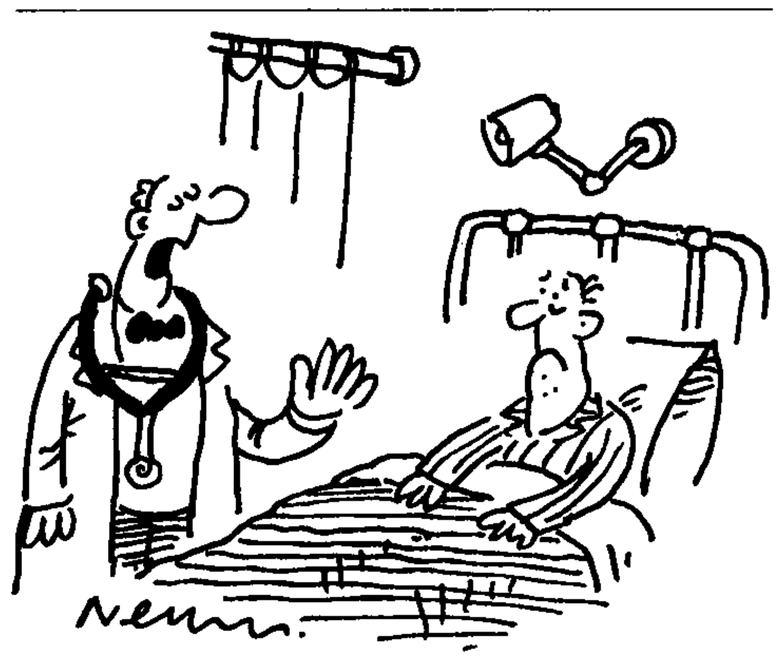
BRUSSELS SPROUTS

ONE of Neil Kinnock's parting shots as European commissioner in charge of personnel issues was summarily to sack 43 language teachers in favour of cheaper agency staff.

Many of those dismissed last June had worked for the commission for more than 25 years but are unable to claim benefits until they reach their official retirement age of 65.

As MEP Stephen Hughes, a Labour member of the European parliament's employment committee, has pointed out on many occasions: "Any private company behaving in this way would find itself in breach of EU laws on information and consultation, collective redundancies and transfer of undertakings. Yet because Belgian laws don't apply to the commission as a public administration, the law does not apply to it. The commission asks the corporate world to act in a socially responsible way, and yet the way it has handled this has been totally socially irresponsible."

The teachers are now taking the commission to an industrial tribunal, but Kinnock has long since departed (with his own commission pension of more than £50,000 a year intact). Meanwhile it emerged in a debate last month that one of the unsuccessful bidders for the contract to provide language teaching after the dismissal of the in-house staff was the British Council, whose new chair is none other than… Lord Kinnock of Bedwellty!



"Relax – MRSA will get you before the Asian Flu"

TV

The Apprentice (BBC2)

IS business intrinsically interesting? One of the cornerstones of the Rev Blair's enterprise culture, of course, is that business is actually more interesting than almost anything. It's also more important, sexier and better in every imaginable way.

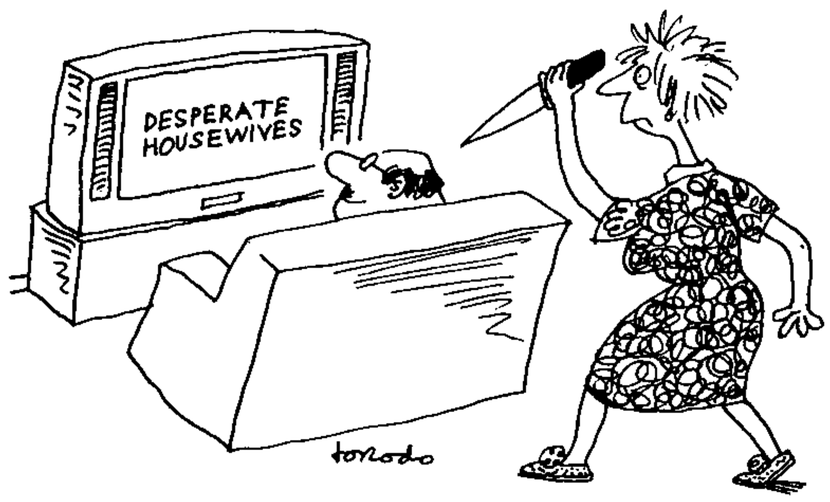
Businessmen and businesswomen are the new heroes of the age – or, at least, of the prime minister. Broadcasters are naturally obliged to reflect this development, especially with charter renewal around the corner. So a once useful and informative series like The Money Programme falls so out of favour that it isn't even allowed to call itself The Money Programme any more, for fear of appearing too serious. Instead, shoddy American formats like The Apprentice are remade for a British audience and hauled sweatily into BBC2 primetime for us all to admire.

Farewell Donald Trump with his sorry hairstyle and plastic wives. Hello Sir Alan Sugar with his millions of unwanted Amstrad computers.

Business becomes entertainment at last, and government surely approves. The Apprentice, however, stretches all previous definitions of the word "entertainment" to snapping point.

This is of course a reality show of a type once robustly condemned by Germaine Greer. Fourteen young people in suits are competing for a job in Sir Alan's firm, doing whatever it is that he does now that his computers no longer sell. At the beginning of the show the "boys" and "girls", split into their two groups, are set a business task. "This is not a game," he tells the contestants, lying. "This is a 12-week job interview. Never, ever, ever underestimate me."

This is a man with a face like an old slipper, the last person in Europe to retain George Michael-style designer stubble. If we didn't underestimate him, where would the fun be? "I don't like liars, I don't like cheats, I don't like bullshitters, I don't like schmoozers." Around the table, 14 assorted liars, cheats, bullshitters and schmoozers gulp. At the end of each show, Sir Alan points his finger at one of them and says "You're fired." He leaves that all-important beat between pointing the finger and saying the words, something he has clearly been practising in the mirror every morning. We can look forward to him repeating the gesture on every known chat show until the day he dies.

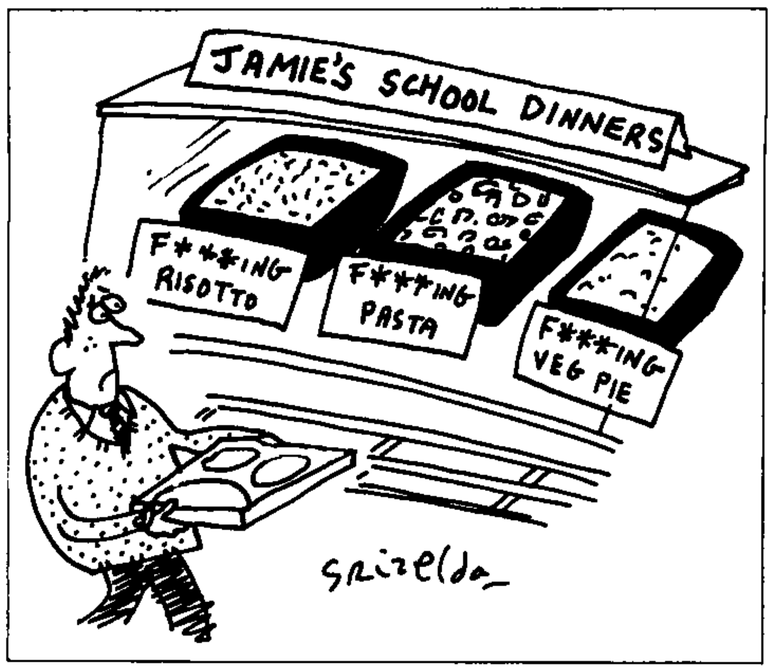


The main problem with the show, though, is the absolute ghastliness of the contestants. There's the transport manager who never spurns an opportunity to show us his muscles; the casually sexist property developer with braces; the bankrupt internet entrepreneur who talks and talks and never listens; the estate agent; the sales executive; the "communications executive" – whatever that is.

Each of them talks the talk and walks the walk. The talk is, essentially, drivel. This week they all had to invent toys. "We need six viable and fantastic ideas that we can then ask the others to critique for us," one woman said. The others nodded sagely. "How about a toy that, if someone else has got one, they're kind of modular, you can put them together, or they can interact together." No sentence is complete without at least two spurts of meaningless jargon.

As for walking the walk, most of the male contestants stride around aggressively as though their genitals are so huge and misshapen this is really the only way they can move with any degree of comfort. Dogs have more self-awareness than this lot. In an ideal world such misplaced self-confidence would be treated with drugs, or possibly electric shock treatment. You don't want any of them to win. You just want them to suffer.

Is it all an elaborate joke? You'd like to think so, if it weren't for the deadly earnestness with which the programme has been made. With its unquestioning, slightly breathless voice-over and lots of dramatic background music out of a 60s spy movie, it seeks to glorify rather than to satirise – which might actually be just as effective in the end, for watching this week after week could turn even the kindliest liberal into a rabid revolutionary. But who on earth is going to watch it week after week? Crucially, The Apprentice fails as entertainment: its hour-long episodes seem to last much, much longer. In the end it's the nation that will decide with its remote controls, but "You're fired" seems the likeliest verdict.



AD NAUSEAM

A LETTER last week from Christopher Graham, director-general of the Advertising Standards Authority, to all the political parties deserves further comment.

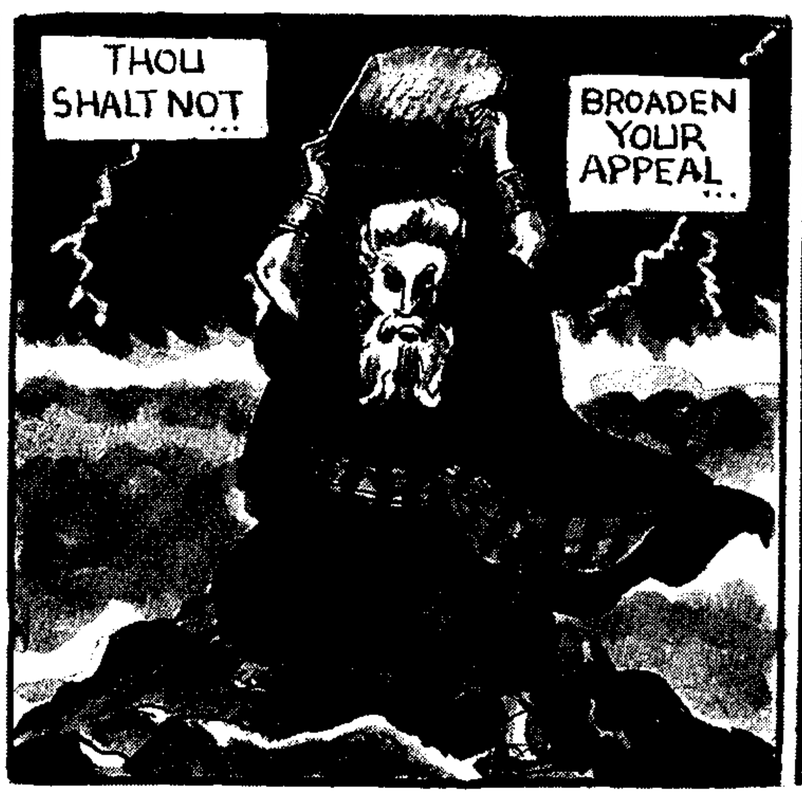
Graham indulged in a bit of pre-election arse-covering by reminding party leaders of the ASA's policy on election posters. That policy is of course to ignore them. Following the furore of the 1997 campaign and the Tories' infamous "Demon Eyes" poster, the ASA decided that rather than impose tighter regulation on election advertising, it would impose no regulation at all. Political parties, after all, "are occasional advertisers and have never signed up to the CAP code".

One could equally argue that these are grounds not to allow political parties to advertise at all – the first precept of the code being that all communications should be "legal, honest, decent and truthful". The fact that political posters are not, as Mr Graham reminds us, required to be legal, honest, decent or truthful, may explain why no one pays them much attention.

ASDA's £7m contract with Sharon Osbourne will see her front a year-long campaign which aims to "suggest how Asda can help mothers to keep their families healthy".

Mrs Osbourne is obviously eminently qualified for this, having booked two of her three children into rehab while they were still teenagers.

But her new friendship with the company is unlikely to see increased income for the rest of her family: Asda's parent Wal-Mart has a strict policy of refusing to stock material which features "parental advisory" stickers, ruling out most of husband Ozzy's music as well as the DVDs and videos of the foul-mouthed family's television series. In 1985 the chain even banned rock magazines such as *Rolling Stone* from their shelves after Osbourne was sued by the parents of a child who committed suicide after listening to one of his songs.



MEDIA NEWS

WHO WAS behind the front-page story in the *Financial Times* that John "Blue Sky" Birt had been pressing for money raised by the BBC's licence fee to be shared out among commercial competitors, one of the key recommendations of the public broadcasting report submitted by Lord Burns?

The only suspect so far is Howell James, a hiking-partner and good friend of both Birt and Burns, who is now the chief government spin-doctor.

If James were behind the leak, it would not be the first time he has served as Birt's mouthpiece in his war against BBC chairman Michael Grade. As the *Eye* pointed out when he was first recruited to the government ranks (at the instigation of Birt), James was on hand as Birt's spin-doctor to deliver a vicious briefing against Grade in 1992 when his keynote address to the Edinburgh Television Festival was sharply critical of Birt's BBC and his army of consultants.

"Michael Grade caricatures some of the ideas that have been discussed without properly considering the arguments behind them," James said. "He seemingly offers only that the BBC should respond to change by staying the same." Watch out for more in this continuing feud.

BBC director-general Mark Thompson's weekly email to staff on 14 February lamented at length the departure of BBC1 controller Lorraine Heggessy, who has a new job at Talkback Thames.

"I'm really sorry Lorraine's going," sobbed Thompson. "Like everyone else who knows her, I'm going to miss that sheer energy and those peals of laughter. But she's done a great tour of duty…"

In the midst of his sorrow – and a few plugs for the corporation's digital services and the "Have a Heart Payroll giving campaign" – Thompson was unable to find space to commemorate the rather more permanent exit of news producer Kate Peyton, who was shot while on assignment in Somalia after 12 years of service at the BBC.

Fortunately, such is the open and accountable nature of the BBC that several of her colleagues were able let the D-G know exactly what they thought of his sense of priorities by return of email.

THE BBC's once highly respected training department, now merged with "BBC People", is on its last legs. An internal memo from its head Nigel Paine warns staff that "the current situation is serious" and "there is a general obligation on every single member of staff to conserve funds".

Ironic, then, that department bins are still crammed full of the recent glossy *Be Your Best: Sharing Good Practice* booklets, depicting clowns making balloon animals to demystify the process of "choosing where to share".

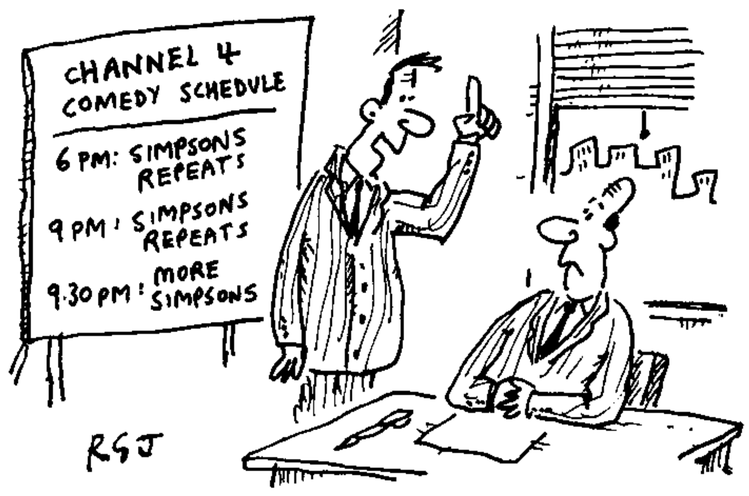
The booklet was produced by the "Live & Learn Team", part of BBC People.

10:00 – 10:55
Lessons of effective leadership
The Rt Hon William Hague MP

British Insurance Brokers Association Conference

THE BBC is trying to suggest that it is not actually closing its Get Writing website (see *Eye* 1122).

After 24 March, "the community of interest, that wraps around that site, will no longer continue", Liz Cleaver, controller of learning and interactive, explained to listeners of Radio 4's Feedback. However, as this was the means by which budding writers shared their work for appraisal, one of them suggests to the Eye that without it, the site "might as well be called 'Get Reading'."



"Gone are the days when people could accuse us of constantly showing 'Friends' repeats"

IT'S all change at the BBC World Service, where a new policy of introducing "younger, fresher voices" has begun to enrage regular listeners.

British accents are no longer popular, apparently, and one reporter who did not fit the new bill was sacked by telephone.

The same approach is being rolled out at BBC Radio Four, where younger reporters are being sought and producers have been told to focus on black and ethnic voices in the latest programme offers round.

WHILE the *Times* dismissed the BBC's Jazz Britannia concerts at the Barbican as "a parade of the predictable", the *Guardian* reported the two-night marathon in more favourable terms.

The reviewer was John Fordham, who, by a stunning coincidence, was a consultant on the Jazz Britannia series.

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Which actress was married to Humphrey Bogart, and is also the cousin of former Israeli prime minister Shimon Peres?
Contestant: Gene Kelly.
AR: Which humorous poet is famous for such poems as "Oh! I Wish I'd Looked After Me Teeth" and "They Should Have Asked My Husband"?
Contestant: Tennyson.

BBC Radio GMR, afternoon quiz

Presenter: Which English Queen is the cocktail "Bloody Mary" named after?
Contestant: Er, is it Margherita?

DUMB AMERICA

The Weakest Link

Anne Robinson: Which prison shipped out the last of its inmates and closed down in 1963?
Contestant: Australia.

HUMBUG SPECIAL

"THIS explicit film pretends to be art, but it's just filth," complained Caroline Virr in the *Daily Express*'s first review of Michael Winterbottom's sexually explicit film *Nine Songs*.

"It leaves nothing to the imagination. It shows Lisa, played by Margo Stilley, and Matt (Kieran O'Brien) having varied and unsimulated explicit sex, indulging in sex games and talking dirty… There is not much dialogue, there is a lot of panting and it has only the bare bones of a plot… No matter how tastefully shot the scenes, it is in my book making an act public which should be treasured and kept private."

Curiously, her proprietor seems to be of a different opinion. According to the website of his own television channel, heavily promoted every day in the *Express*, "we at Television X just LOVE to see people fucking!"

"MAXINE has rights, too," tutted the *Daily Mirror* in its editorial column on the day after Mr Justice Eady granted the Soham killer's former girlfriend lifelong anonymity.

"She should be afforded the same rights and protections as any other member of a civilised society… if that means her identity must be protected then so be it. The rule of law must be allowed to prevail. It does not reflect well on us as a society if we hanker for a more vindictive punishment for offenders."

Quite right too. And naturally, the fact that *Mirror* was one of the papers which went to court last May to challenge the temporary injunction which granted Carr exactly those rights, and to demand the right to publish pictures of her and reveal her whereabouts following her release from prison, in no way diminishes its new-found respect for the rule of law.

5 Number crunchings

- TV channel to which Tony Blair devoted an entire day of his time in effort to "meet the public"
- Only TV channel which provided employment for Alastair Campbell after he had to leave Number Ten

POLICE have taken the unusual step of issuing a description of a man wanted for questioning in connection with a murder in Leith. The man is described as balding, with a scar on his face, green and rotting teeth, and the word 'Saughton' [Edinburgh's prison] tattooed on his leg. Members of the public are advised not to approach this man.

— BBC Radio Scotland news item, 3 February.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

NAOMI CAMPBELL SPEAKS
GOD···ALL THE COCAINE····
IT WAS TERRIBLE WHAT IT DID TO ME!!!
DON'T BEAT YOURSELF UP OVER IT!
DRUGGY MODELS WEEKLY
···BEAT UP YOUR HOUSEKEEPER, AND YOUR PERSONAL ASSISTANT, AND EVERYONE ELSE WHO WORKS FOR YOU.!···
OKAY THEN!
RUB RUB
DRUGGY MODELS WEEKLY

DOING THE ROUNDS

AS THE election approaches, the challenge for "new" Labour is to prove that doubling the NHS budget since 1997 has led to an equivalent improvement in the nation's health. This isn't easy.

The NHS is certainly doing more, with admissions up by a quarter; but there is no agreed measure of "health" and so it is hard to say whether this increased medicalisation is improving the quality of people's lives.

The erasure of very long waits for effective surgery (eg hips, hearts and cataracts) is certainly an achievement, and there have been modest improvements in survival rates for heart disease and cancer; but much of the government's consumerist health policy may just be increasing people's dependency on the NHS.

NHS Direct is now handling 16 million calls a year – superficially a huge success – but there is no evidence it is taking the strain off other parts of the service. Indeed, the reverse is true. Attendances at accident and emergency departments are up by 18 percent this year, with a 40 percent increase in admissions to hospital from casualty.

If all these attendances and admissions were appropriate (ie genuine emergencies turning up to casualty and being admitted), Labour could claim its improved access to the NHS had uncovered a huge well of unmet need. Alas, up to 70 percent of casualty patients don't need to be there and there is evidence that many of the admissions are not on clinical grounds, but merely to avoid breaching the four-hour in-casualty waiting target. As Plymouth radiologist Dr Mike Williams puts it: "A patient with no diagnosis on an inappropriate ward who leaves A&E in 3 hours 59 minutes is a success. The one who leaves at four hours and one minute to the right ward with the right diagnosis is a failure."

Under the government's payment-by-results (PBR) scheme which is being tested in foundation hospitals, this "gaming" has led to a huge increase in emergency care bills for the primary care trusts and forced a delay in the roll out of PBR. But the implication is clear: hospital income will depend crucially on the correct coding and billing of patients, and the more you can investigate and find wrong with them, the more you can charge. As with private medicine, this is a licence to medicalise without any proven benefit to patients.

The government would prefer it if all these inappropriate and expensive hospital attendances and admissions were diverted to the community; but having promoted patient choice and allowed GPs to opt out of on-call, they can hardly argue with patients who choose to go to casualty knowing they'll only have to wait four hours to be seen, rather than two days for a GP.

Attempts to manage elderly patients at home may also backfire. One recent study found that home-based medication reviews by pharmacists increased hospital admission rates by 30 percent and led to 43 percent more GP home visits, without improving the quality or length of their lives.

Why did this happen? GPs are now paid handsomely for over-medicalising the elderly, who average six prescriptions each. Left to their own devices, they forget to take most of them. But with the pharmacist reminding them, they take the lot, get side effects, fall over and need to go to hospital. As the authors put it: "We may just have increased anxiety, confusion and dependence on the health services." A fine epitaph for much of the new NHS.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

IF THERE WAS A TERRORIST DIRTY BOMB ATTACK...
SECURITY ALERT ORANGE
BIOLOGICAL TERROR THREAT
DO YOU THINK THE HOSPITAL COULD COPE?
WARDS
OH, I THINK SO...
STAFF WOULD HAVE IMMUNITY FOR STARTERS
DANGER
SUPER BUG RIFE
HOSPITAL VIRUS A KILLER

SIGNAL FAILURES

Back to the future

LABOUR's latest idea to fix the "dysfunctional" rail system (transport secretary Alistair Darling's word) is to bring back one of the biggest flaws of the Tories' original privatisation.

The "strategic" rail authority (SRA) tightened central control of train franchises after a period when each company did its own thing in pursuit of profits with no thought for network cohesion. But franchisees have been complaining about being told what to do; so now the government wants them to take "revenue risk" to have an incentive to increase their income. A senior civil servant said "maximising revenue and quality of service" were what the government had in mind, and it was in "vigorous agreement" with the franchisees.

Oh dear! Does the government still believe naively that the urge to maximise revenue automatically makes private firms improve their service quality? That was the starting point for privatisation back in 1993; since when there has been overwhelming evidence that maximising revenue in a subsidised system of finite capacity rarely translates into better public service, even when "revenue risk" turns out to mean that franchises are bailed out with public cash.

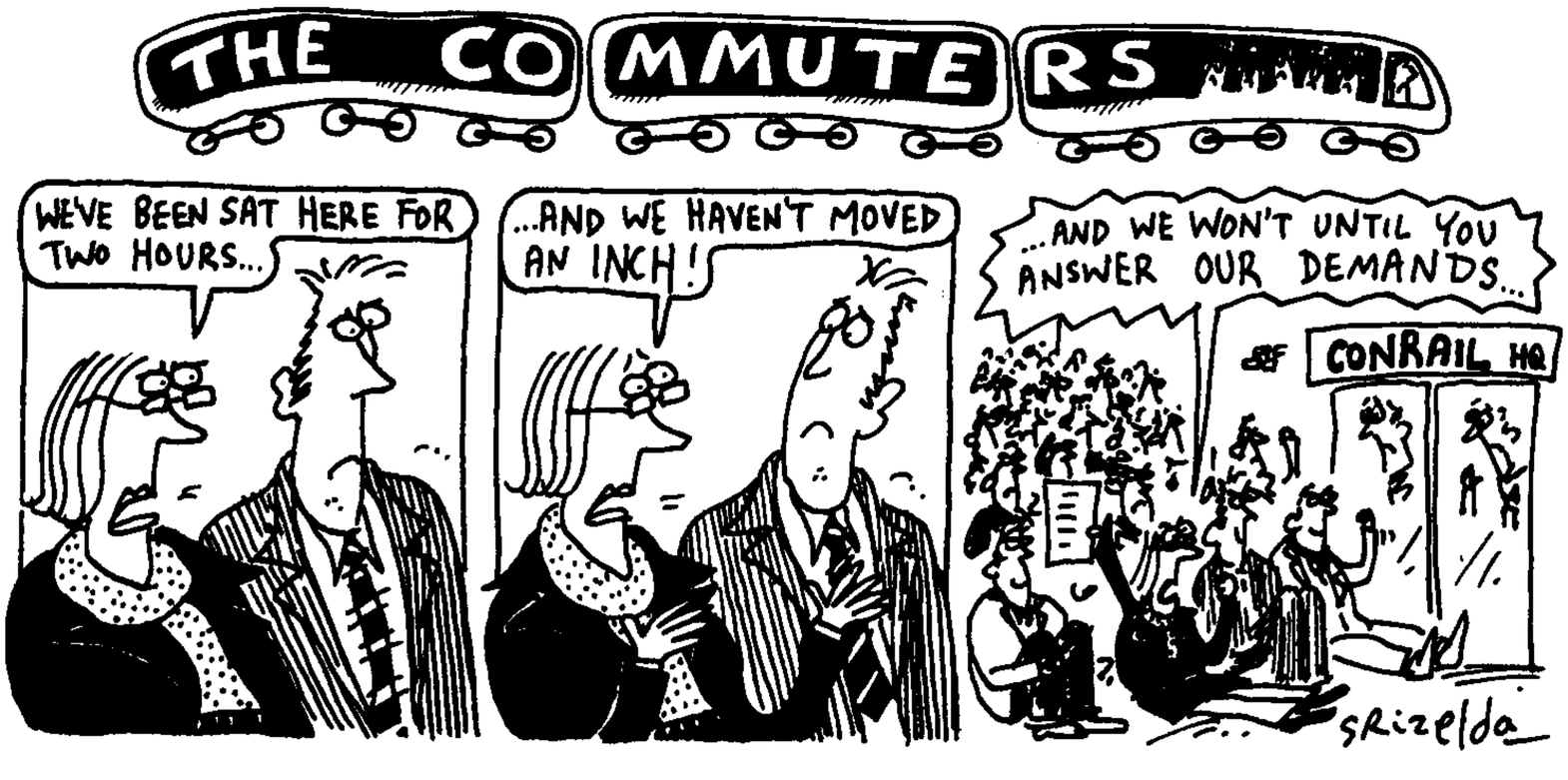
Virgin was so keen to maximise revenue that by 2000 it admitted its peak-time trains on the west-coast mainline were carrying empty seats because it had banned cheaper fares to force business travellers to pay top whack (Eye 994). The company's failed business plans are now shored up with giant buttresses of emergency subsidy – but it still charges staggering fares. One Eye reader used the 5.15pm from Euston one weekday recently and counted just five other passengers in his standard-class carriage leaving London on a train where nearly half the carriages were first class. The cheapest ticket valid on the train (excluding advance-purchase tickets which have draconian restrictions and can be hard to buy) was a single to Warrington, at £87.50. This under-use of capacity is obscene when, for example, London's transport infrastructure creaks under pressure of numbers. Is Virgin West-coast really getting £330m subsidy to move empty seats around Britain's biggest mainline?

National Express, which has more franchises than anyone else, doesn't need encouragement or help from government to maximise revenue. Last year, its rail profits rose 76 percent. That was before January's big fare increases, when the cost of an annual c2c season ticket with Travelcard for Tilbury-London rose 8.8 percent. Soon that franchise could be renamed cTV: National Express will maximise revenue by bombarding passengers with adverts from TV screens on trains.

The company already has on-board TV at Central Trains but is too tight to employ enough drivers there. Passengers have suffered service cuts since 1 January after a temporary overtime agreement with drivers ended. Birmingham's cross-city line is badly affected but Central says the service's reliability (trains not cancelled) improved in January from 98.3 to 99.8 percent (southern end) and 98 to 99.4 percent (northern). Official statistics don't count the suspended services; so Central maximises revenue by denying commuters compensation while saving on overtime pay.

Although profits remain high, franchisees have reason to be unhappy with the SRA's policy of intrusion, which forces them to refer even minor business decisions to SRA bureaucrats for approval. One SRA-brokered franchise deal includes more than 250 "key performance indicators"; recording and monitoring them takes inordinate management time.

So controlling franchises from the centre is impractical and bureaucratic, and the alternative – leaving them to their own devices – is a costly disaster for passengers and taxpayers. The obvious conclusion is that franchising the entire national railway is unworkable, as well as expensive and pointless (Eye 1116), but that's a conclusion "new" Labour is too blinkered to reach.


THE COMMUTERS
WE'VE BEEN SAT HERE FOR TWO HOURS...
...AND WE HAVEN'T MOVED AN INCH!
...AND WE WON'T UNTIL YOU ANSWER OUR DEMANDS...
CONRAIL HQ
Grizelda

WHY is Virgin a contender to take the east-coast mainline franchise off GNER after the government has decided past performance will influence future franchise awards? Lord Davies of Oldham, a government transport spokesman, answered that in the Lords recently when he said the east-coast franchise competition "was launched in advance of this decision". In other words, past performance won't be taken into account and the door is conveniently ajar for Beardie.

'Dr B. Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

HENGE AND RACKET

THE Thornborough Henges, three huge prehistoric circle-and-ditch structures near Ripon in north Yorkshire, have been described as "the Stonehenge of the North".

Such is the archaeological importance of these little-known monuments, laid out some 5,000 years ago in an area as rich with barrows, cursuses and other remains as Salisbury Plain, that English Heritage describes Thornborough as the most important ancient site between Wiltshire and the Orkneys. Each of Thornborough's circles is 240 metres across – large enough to contain 10 Stonehenges. But the visitor who turns off the A1 in search of the henges will find no helpful brown sign to guide him. Better to look out for the giant conveyors on which Tarmac Northern Ltd, a subsidiary of Anglo-American, the world's biggest mining company, extracts 500,000 tons of gravel a year from its Nosterfield quarry, a couple of hundred yards to the north of the monument.

Tarmac has already worked out large quarries immediately to the west of the henges, and Nosterfield is coming to the end of its life. Tarmac has therefore applied to North Yorkshire county council (NYCC) for planning permission to open another quarry at nearby Ladybridge farm. In the longer term it plans to excavate all the land around the henges, in some places coming as close as 50 metres to the monuments. When quarrying

is finished the henges would survive as an island in the middle of a series of lakes, as it is cheaper for Tarmac to let the holes it has made fill up with water (and call them "nature reserves") than restore the landscape to farmland.

For many people who care about Britain's heritage, the thought of this important ancient landscape being torn up is appalling. In a parliamentary answer to Vale of York MP Anne McIntosh in December 2003, culture secretary Tessa Jowell said: "My officials are supporting English Heritage's firm opposition to any further gravel extraction in the vicinity of the scheduled site until... the archaeology is better understood. English Heritage is concerned about the wider landscape setting of the henge monuments and is currently funding a project by Newcastle University to undertake extensive archaeological research in this area."

Alas, the campaign to save the henge landscape is seemingly being undermined by the very man whose job it is to protect it. North Yorkshire county archaeologist Neil Campling has told people not to sign a petition calling for an end to quarrying within a mile of the henges because "there are currently no planning applications for, and not even any discussions about, quarrying around the middle and southern henges" – which isn't true – and because there is "little archaeology" in the fields around the henges.

How Mr Campling can know this, when little investigation has been done, is a mystery. He is happy for Tarmac's own archaeologist Mike Griffiths (Campling's predecessor at the county council) to investigate a sample of just two percent of the Ladybridge site. Other archaeologists believe a sample of eight to 10 percent would give a better idea of what may be there. Ten years ago a two percent survey of Nosterfield – just 50 metres from Ladybridge – led to the conclusion that there was little of interest in the ground, and the planning application was passed. When the diggers went in, Tarmac's archaeologists were "surprised" to find what they admitted was "the largest group of Neolithic features of this type so far recognised in the North of England". Now Tarmac is poised to make the same "mistake" again. But at least it'll get its gravel.

● SO FAREWELL, then, David Nuttall, former leader of North-east Derbyshire district council, who was banned last week from holding public office for three years after being hauled before the local government watchdog. The Standards Board for England's adjudication panel heard how the 67-year-old Labour councillor had burst into a negotiation between management and union reps over Easter working arrangements for street cleaners and ordered the council officers to give the union everything it was demanding – a course which would have been to the financial advantage of the workers involved, one of whom was Nuttall's son, Mark. The panel also heard examples of Cllr Nuttall's robust style. A ferocious, foul-mouthed bollocking of road sweeper Darren Barnett – in the doghouse because a poster had fallen off his lorry – concluded with the words: "Now get in that lorry and go out there and sweep some fucking bastard roads." They don't make 'em like that any more. Thankfully.

ICE COLD ON ALEX

AFTER a fight which has lasted more than three years and cost over £500,000, Lambeth council has failed to convince an employment appeal tribunal (EAT) panel that sacked homeless person's adviser Alex Owolade (*Eyes passim*) should not be reinstated.

The Unison rep was fired in November 2001 after he raised concerns about racism in the housing department. He has now been vindicated, not only by a public inquiry set up and paid for by Lambeth council to examine the allegations he had highlighted, but also *three times* by an employment tribunal.

Last August an ET ordered Lambeth to reinstate Owolade as of 1 October and pay him the three years' salary he was owed. Rather than comply, Lambeth's bone-headed chief executive Faith Boardman launched a costly appeal, despite the fact that in May 2002 the Lib Dem leader of the council, Peter Truesdale, and his Tory deputy, John Whelan, had promised to abide by the ET decision.

On 22 February, after rejecting Lambeth's submission that the order to reinstate Owolade had been "perverse", the EAT ordered that a further remedies hearing be scheduled. It is likely that the compensation Lambeth will be ordered to pay Owolade will be substantially increased, with the generous council taxpayer again footing the bill.

● RACE is a continuing nightmare too for civic bosses in Southwark, where beleaguered Lib Dem leader Nick Stanton and chief executive Bob Coomber are trying to stop publication of much of the result of the five-month inquiry by Lord Herman Ouseley, former head of the commission for racial equality, into a "culture of racism" at the council. Ouseley has threatened to publish independently his report, which describes widespread racist treatment, if Coomber and Stanton attempt a cover-up. Last week it was discovered that eight files containing sensitive material were withheld from the police and the district auditor's investigation into corruption and racism in Southwark's planning department (*Eyes passim*). A furious Knacker has seized the documents and the DA is preparing to reopen his inquiry.

FIDDLERS FREE

AFTER the Donnygate scandal (*Eyes passim*) it became well known locally that some 12 Doncaster councillors and around 20 officers had escaped prosecution by the expedient of repaying taxpayers' money they had stolen before Inspector Knacker came to call.

So the coming into force of the freedom of information act seemed a good time for local resident Joan Moffat, who runs a "Name the Names" campaign, to apply to the council to find out exactly who got away with fiddles and how much money was involved. Now, in the spirit of openness, Doncaster council's legal officer Paul Evans has replied. "I have considered your request and conclude that the information is exempt from disclosure," he says. So no change there, then.

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

THE playing fields at Brockhurst Road in Birmingham's Hodge Hill are perfectly flat, never get waterlogged and are in heavy demand from sports clubs. Just the place to plonk a 55,000 sq ft Tesco megastore!

Birmingham city council stands to receive between £2m and £3m for the site, not to mention the section 106 planning "bribe" Tesco will have to pay to offset the increased pressure on local services. *Ker-ching!*

As "detached educational playing fields", the site is intended for use by several local schools. But the schools don't use the fields as much as they might like because there are no changing rooms on site. Outside school hours, however, they are used by a plethora of sports clubs for both children and adults.

Rather than improve the facilities for schools, and youngsters' sporting opportunities, by the relatively cheap measure of building changing rooms, the council is ready to use the schools' under-use of the fields as the perfect excuse to declare them surplus to requirements.

Local campaigners, including MP Liam Byrne, say that not only will a megastore destroy the green space but it will also devastate independent food and clothes shops in the nearby Fox and Goose shopping centre.

The scheme has been slightly delayed after Birmingham decided Tesco's first application was unsatisfactory. But tellingly the council reassured the *Eye* that "the playing field site will not be declared surplus until a satisfactory scheme has come forward with appropriate local compensatory benefits." In other words, Tesco just has to stump up the right price.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

THIS BREAD IS ATROCIOUS: LIMP, PALLID, TASTELESS...
AND AS FOR THE WINE: TIRED, UNPREPOSSESING AND 'CORKED' TO BOOT!
WE'RE NOT REALLY ENTERING INTO THE SPIRIT OF HOLY COMMUNION, ARE WE, GENTLEMEN?

NOOKS and CORNERS

MORE from Liverpool on the baleful effects of being made European City of Culture. In January the department of culture, media 'n' sport was asked to consider listing Maritime Buildings, the premises of Joseph P. Lamb & Sons, ship's chandlers, which stood on the corner of Wapping and Carpenters Row but was earmarked for replacement by a block of luxury apartments.

On Friday 4 February the DCMS contacted Liverpool council about the building, which was speedily pulled down the following weekend.

Perhaps Maritime Buildings was not listable on architectural grounds as it was a rather nondescript two-storey brick structure. But the real point about the building was that it was a purpose-built ship's chandlers, once stocked with everything needed for seafaring, and the only such business surviving in the city.

Liverpool, European City of Culture in 2008, makes much of its maritime heritage these days; and as Maritime Buildings was close to the Wapping Warehouses and the King's Dock, and not far from the Albert Dock – the epicentre of the city's regeneration (courtesy of Michael Heseltine, not the city council) which contains the splendid Merseyside Maritime Museum – there would seem to have been good reasons for preserving it. But no: in European cities of culture, as Glasgow showed long ago – making money comes first.

The other interesting point about this case is that the firm of Joseph P. Lamb & Sons, established 1784, is owned by Cllr Sir Trevor Jones who used to be the Liberal leader of Liverpool council in the early 1980s at the time of the Toxteth riots. His wife Doreen is also a councillor (Lib Dem) and just happens to chair the city's planning committee. But obviously there can be no possible conflict of interest here. Sir Trevor sold the building on to a developer as he claimed it failed to meet current health and safety requirements, so that's all right then.

Liverpool just happens to be keen on new development in the Wapping area and it is usually derelict Georgian buildings that are being replaced by smart new blocks of flats. After the planning committee recently turned down a proposal for a 51-storey tower further south at Brunswick Quay, Lady Jones was quoted as having "serious concerns about such a large number of flats being released on to the market at the same time, which could upset our pathfinder housing initiative and the King's Dock development, both of which are important parts of the city council's regeneration policy."

As part of its deep commitment to art and outreach, Liverpool council placed a large sculpture known as the "Superlambana" next to the late Maritime Buildings and overlooking the King's Dock. This 17ft-long creature made of yellow plastic is, yes, a cross between a lamb and a banana and I am sorry to learn it was recently vandalised with grafitti: "Trevor destroys what the Luftwaffe couldn't" and "Trevor and Doreen partners in slime." This seems very unfair. After all, it is the Derek Hatton era in Liverpool that everyone is fearful of returning to, not the Trevor Jones era.

READERS will recall the controversy in the picturesque Kentish village of Penshurst over the proposal by the diocese of Rochester to sell the handsome old Queen Anne rectory and build a nice new one in the grounds on the church's glebe land (Eyes passim). This was despite the strong opposition of the parish and village, and regardless of the offer by Viscount de l'Isle of Penshurst Place to lease the (listed) old rectory so that the diocese did not have to bear the cost of its maintenance while it remained in use for the purpose for which it was built.

Well, having been refused planning permission for a new rectory, the case went to appeal in 2002 and the diocese got its way. The

old rectory has been sold off to some plutocrat – after all, it's quite wrong that ordinary clergy any more than bishops should be able to enjoy living in draughty old historic buildings – and Penshurst is now enhanced by a new residence which I am proud to illustrate – proof that there is nothing fuddy-duddy about the Church of England.

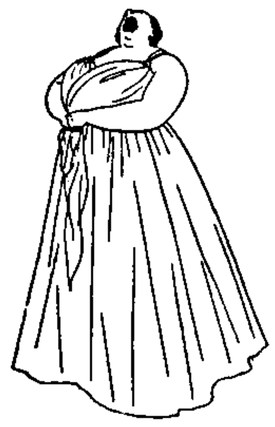
The house sets the right classless image for a modern vicar as it is just the sort of house that might go up on, say, a new Wates-built executive estate outside Bracknell or Basingstoke. Note the skill with which the architect has balanced modernity with tradition. There are no tall chimneys – silly, redundant things – but the brick gable walls blend into the village while there is a subtle hint of half-timber in that horizontal band below the eaves. Dr Michael Nazir-Ali, the Bishop of Rochester, must be very pleased that he triumphed over selfish parochial obscurantism and I am sure the villagers are now very proud of their prominent new building and realise how wrong they were to oppose him.

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Sainsbury, Edinburgh*

Submitted by Magnus Henderson. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS



HAVING gone all the way to Australia to find the world's least likely chief executive in Sean Doran, ENO has now gone... all the way *back* to Australia to find the world's least likely music director in Oleg Caetani.

The appointment of Doran bears all the hallmarks of Martin Smith, the opera company's extremely hands-on chairman. For Smith plucked Doran from obscurity (to anyone who doesn't live in Melbourne) knowing that his lack of profile, lack of opera house experience and uncharismatic manner would present little challenge to Smith's own authority.

The same holds true for Caetani who, in fairness, has considerable opera house experience but is totally outside the culture of the British music world, wholly unprepared for the political machinations of a company like ENO and unlikely ever to get the measure of them because he won't be here often or long enough to do so.

Caetani has only just taken over as chief conductor *and* artistic director of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. And although ENO has been at pains to say his Melbourne contract only obliges him to be in Australia for three months of the year, it's clearly going to be more than that. One look at the interviews he's given to the Australian press makes it clear he considers Melbourne his chief commitment, with hugely ambitious plans for Bruckner cycles, Tchaikovsky cycles, Schumann cycles, concert operas and the like. That's quite a lot for three months.

ENO, meanwhile, faces a raft of problems and desperately needs a full-time, on-site, unequivocally committed music director if it's ever to recover the artistic confidence it once had in abundance but has lost. Caetani isn't going to be that man. Nor is he going to be the man to implement the new policy announced by Doran barely a month ago. From now on, said Doran at ENO's annual press conference, he would be stressing the *Englishness* of English National Opera. *English* language, *English* repertory and *English* artists were the company's future. How that sits with the appointment of a Russian-Italian music director, whose career has until recently been based in Germany, who has only had one, somewhat equivocal engagement at ENO (his only time conducting opera in Britain), who admits that English is the weakest of his various languages and who will to a large extent be running the company's musical life from the other side of the world, is hard to understand. Unless, of course, you happen to be Martin Smith, with an agenda of your own.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Painting while on the run for murder...
A debauched, brutal life, cut short at 40...
A morbidly perverse imagination...
CARAVAGGIO
THE FINAL YEARS
NATIONAL GALLERY
FEB 23 TO MAY 22
Some people have all the luck!

Letters

Pulling our leg

Sir,

There's a lot of guff printed in your organ about fish farming, mutations and other such nonsense. My dear wife and I had a leg of Scottish salmon last week and it was delicious.

Sincerely,
JAMES FOLLETT,
Godalming, Surrey.

Fish and chips

Sir,

What an interesting article was Down on the Fish Farm (Eye 1126), relating Sainsbury's sacking of the advertising agency responsible for the recent misleading salmon ads. I have read it and reread it, but find no mention of Sainsbury's sacking the (ir)responsible salmon producers for farming such shoddy produce.

JOHN CLEGG,
Via email.

Every little helps?

Sir,

Whilst not being the greatest fan of Tesco, I thought you might like to have an update on your recent coverage on their help for the Tsunami in Asia.

Tesco have: bought four fishing boats to help Sri Lankan fishermen; bought 750 school bags and supplies for Thai children; sent £32,000 of essentials to the Maldives; supplied clothes for tourists who arrived home with nothing; supplied medical equipment in Malaysia; helped the Red Cross team to reach the disaster area; invested £18,000 in the Fish and Ships Scheme to help rebuild fishing communities in Sri Lanka.

Hope this puts things right (and gets me a pay rise),

DEREK ROBERTS,
Via email.

History lesson

Sir,

The "Mask of Agamemnon" you printed in Eye 1126 isn't. It is the mask of an unknown Mycenean at least 300 years older.

If we believe Euripides in The Troades, Agamemnon was all in favour of Trojan immigration. However, his advisers said Trojan slaves could be a threat to Mycenean security. Accordingly, not having tagging and house detention options available, Agamemnon compromised by ordering all the Trojan men massacred on a necessary and strictly limited basis while admitting women and children as slaves.

Of course, as everybody knows, Euripides was not really writing about the Trojans but was satirising the events of 416BC in Athens. The War Party had risen to power and, against the wishes of the majority of Athenians, commenced pre-emptive action against those they perceived as enemies. Picking a fight with the hapless Dorians, the Athenian army invaded and occupied the island of Milos, then dealt with the subsequent security problem by necessary and strictly limited massacre of all the men. Flushed with success, the War Party then ordered the invasion of Sicily and suffered the disastrous loss of their army at Syracuse.

But all this is ancient history.

Yours sincerely,
RUSSELL VALANCE,
Rotherhithe, London SE16.

Quest over

Sir,

As you will doubtless receive many communications informing you, Veritas: The Quest (HP Sauce, Eye 1126) may have been cancelled after four episodes in the US, but British SF fans were "treated" to all 13 episodes, courtesy of the UK Sci-Fi channel (it really did stink though). Any similarities with Mr Kilroy-Silk's party are obviously entirely coincidental.

Regards,
RICHARD CAMPBELL-JONES,
Via email.

PS: If I am the only sad git that responds on this subject, please withhold my name, to allow me to retain a vestige of respect.

Lookalike

Rossi

HRH

Sir,

Now that Prince Charles sports a very fetching ponytail (Eye 1126, front cover), there seems to be a striking resemblance to Francis Rossi of Status Quo. If they are related then Camilla should be told.

MICHAEL KITLEY,
Canvey Island, Essex.

Dirty protest

Sir,

I was rather bemused at the news regarding Michael Howard and his crusade against MRSA.

I was a student nurse in 1984 when there were approximately 100,000 hospital cleaners in the NHS. The Conservative government introduced contracting-out of domestic services. Healthcare workers who went on strike believing that this would be detrimental to patient care were vilified in the press.

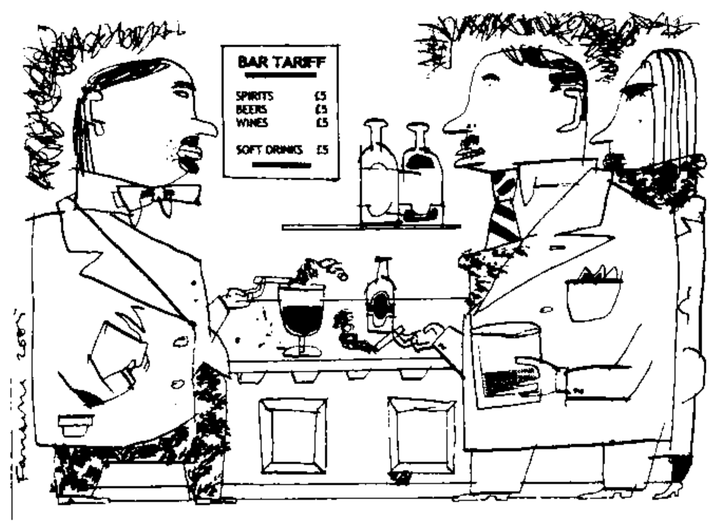
Fast forward to today when we have approximately 55,000 hospital cleaners.

All studies have reported a massive increase in MRSA since 1984 and I am sure that a detailed analysis of the figures could pinpoint a direct correlation between these two factors.

Yours sincerely,
CAROL ADAMSON,
Via email.

The post-Xmas depression gradually merged into the pre-Easter depression

Scenes You Seldom See



"I always say that going to a West End show and having a meal out afterwards is terrific value for money"

Waiting game

Sir,

I note M.D. (Eye 1126) finds the four-hour A&E wait absurd. This is a widely held view among doctors and is regularly aired in the columns of the Paranoid Medical Press. Funnily enough, when these doctors are asked how long they/their families/friends/neighbours should wait for treatment in A&E, the answer is usually "about 15 minutes". Since what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, I agree that the four-hour wait is absurdly long. I am grateful to my medical, nursing and other clinical and non-clinical colleagues in this hospital for their strenuous efforts to achieve this important patient-focused target. Our complaints about delays in A&E are virtually zero now, and the incidence of violence and aggression within the A&E department has been reduced enormously, so it's better for the staff as well.

Yours,
JOHN COAKLEY,
Medical Director, Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

Nursing a grievance

Sir,

It may amuse your cynicism to learn that student nurses at Leeds are being denied their qualifications until they pass a compulsory essay on "Consumerism in the NHS" – never mind what clinical skills they may possess. And this is no box-ticking exercise but a 3,000-word masters-level essay – one that has already reduced my girlfriend to tears.

Despite a concerted effort through gritted teeth she failed miserably and cannot register as a nurse until she completely rewrites the accursed thing. Her tentative chance at a job risks falling through in the meantime. She has admitted: "I guess I just don't understand what consumerism has to do with healthcare."

Don't we need more nurses like this?

Yours sincerely,
RYAN SHIRLOW,
York.

Seeing red diesel

Sir,

Poor old "Mike" (Eye 1125) – nicked for illegally driving his tractor on the road and illegally using red diesel. I understand the point of the article but doesn't it just highlight why us townies get so fed up with farmers bleating on? Why can't farmers do what the rest of us do when we need to shift a heap of crap from our backyard or our building site – get a skip or lorry in, pay for it and understand that shifting it and disposing of it costs money.

PHIL BIXBY,
Via email.

Lookalike

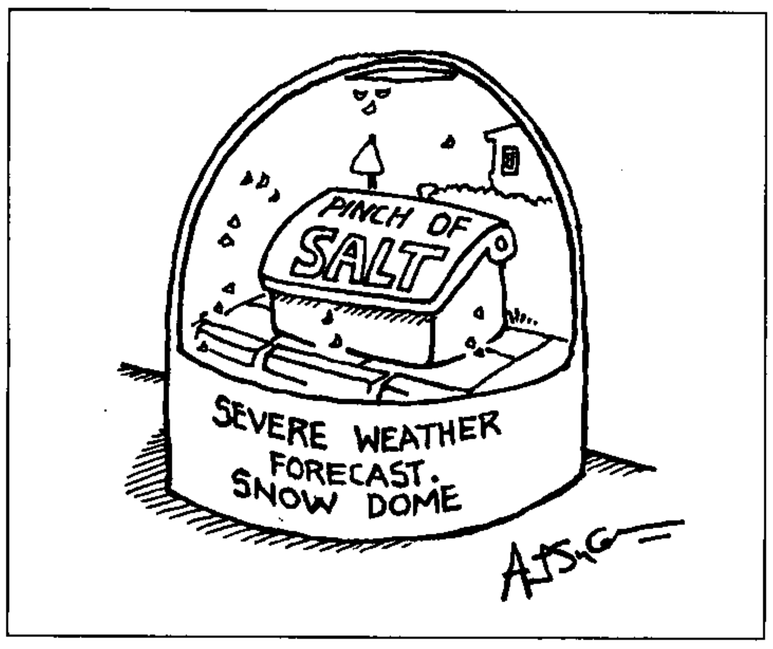
Strindberg

Toni

Sir,

I was wondering if anyone has noticed the surprising resemblance between the dour Swedish playwright August Strindberg and Swiss Toni from The Fast Show? Indeed – as the libidinous car salesman might have remarked – writing suicidally bleak drama is very much like making love to a beautiful woman. Could they by some chance be related?

Yours,
JAMIE DICKSON,
Via email.



It's humour, Jim...

Sir,

Garry Bushell states (Letters, 1126) that he campaigned against Julian Clary hosting the Generation Game due to the "unsuitability of his material".

Jim Davidson's stage act is noted for its frequent use of language completely inappropriate for a family show like the Generation Game, as well as a style of borderline-sexist, borderline-racist humour which prides itself on being "politically incorrect" but tends to be just dull and forgettable. At the same time, Jim Davidson is entirely able to adopt an entirely family-friendly (though still boring) act when hosting the Generation Game. Why doesn't Mr Bushell think Julian Clary can do the same?

Yours,
ARTHUR BOFF,
Oxford.

PS: Is that a good enough fist, Garry?

Claws for thought

Sir,

It seems nobody can get it straight about my old colleague Claudia Wright, not even your esteemed organ.

It certainly seems patent nonsense that Claudia was "a KGB informer" in Washington in the 1980s as alleged in the Sunday Times and Times. But we must be careful of overcooking the conspiracy theories.

Rupert Murdoch may well have "loathed the feminism and radical politics which earned her the nickname 'Claws'..." when Claudia worked for the Melbourne Herald in the 1970s (Eye 1125), but he certainly did not try "to silence her by offering her a job as the paper's personal correspondent at Buckingham Palace" and then later fire her, as you report. He did not buy the Melbourne Herald until 1987.

Yr obdt etc,
BRUCE WILSON,
London SE5.

LUVVIES

"[Our love] is so sacred I feel talking about it is just wrong, in every bone in my body."

GWYNETH PALTROW on her marriage to Chris Martin

Submitted by S. Mann

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Homosexuality is causing painful splits in the Church of England."
BILL TURNBULL, BBC1
(deanb)

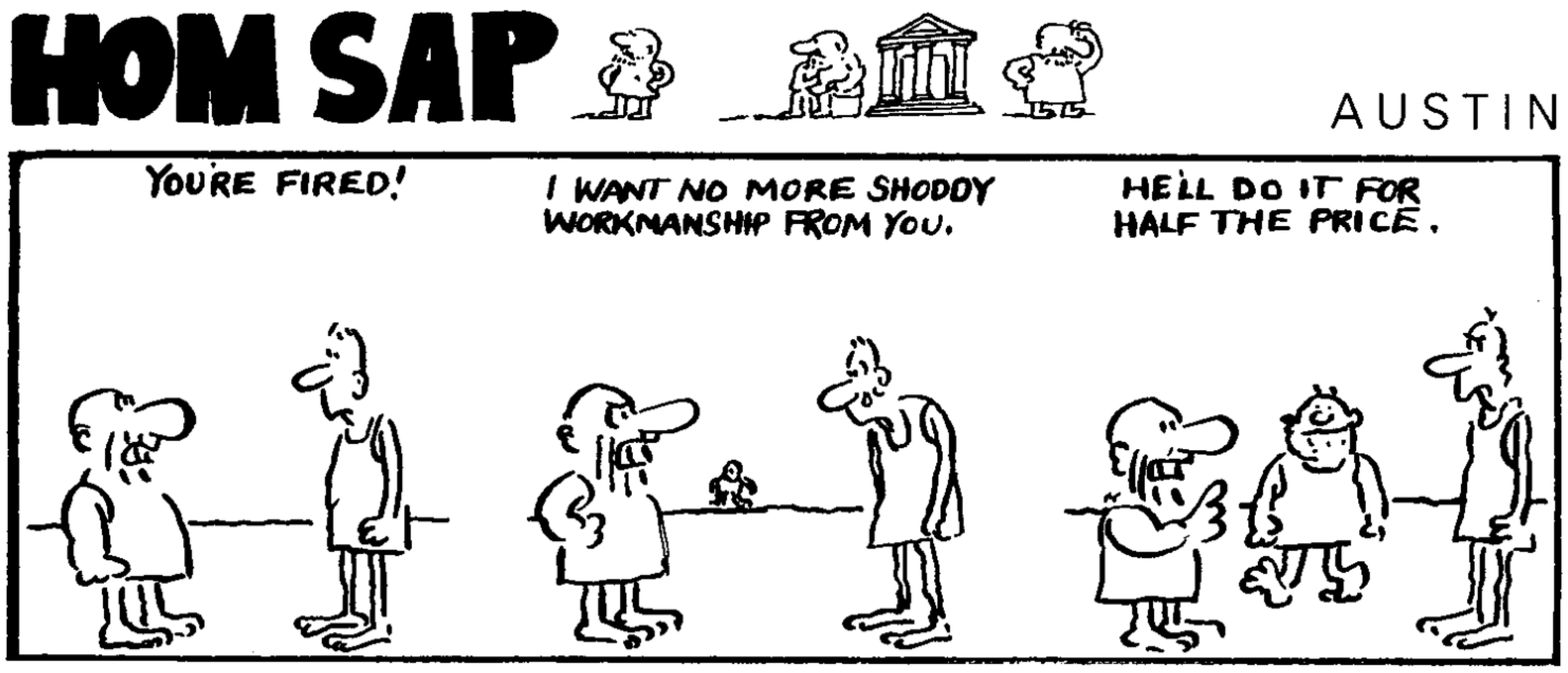
"When you make a mistake, that becomes a mistake."
TERRY VENABLES, ITV1
(Ken Bridges)

"You want to be on the winning side – and if you are, you're the winner."
GRAHAM TAYLOR, Radio 5 Live
(Frederick Payne)

"They are the victims of their own downfall."
DAVID PLEAT, Radio 5 Live
(Kate Rofe)

"I can look in the mirror every day and be pleased with what I'm doing, never rattling anyone's feathers."
MICHAEL OWEN, Daily Mail
(David Hood)

HOM SAP



SOLUTIONS

"Pirtek Fluid Transport Solutions" — *hoses*

"VisyBoard: Innovative Packaging Solutions" — *cardboard boxes*

"Titan: Physical Security Solutions" — *security guards*

"AGM Cleaning Solutions" — *cleaners*

"Framing solutions" — *picture frames*

"Bathing Solutions" — *baths*

"Axiom: Worksurface solutions" — *kitchen tops*

"Isle of Man Post: Integrated Mailing Solutions" — *post*

"Sericol - more than ink: Solutions" — *ink*

All submitted by readers

Anderson country

Sir,

As a long-time fan of Gerry Anderson's productions, I was delighted to see your short item on his new show "New Captain Scarlet" in the current issue. However, I must point out a couple of errors in the item.

Captain Black's first name (Conrad) is **not** *being revealed for the first time, it being well-known as this in the original 1960s puppet version. New this time* **is** *his surname – Lefkon (it was Turner in the 60s version) – a nod to Richard Lefkon, a colleague of Anderson on his earlier series "Space Precinct".*

Secondly, it is incorrect to mix the agents' real and Spectrum names (as in your example "Captain Conrad Black") – he would always be known as "Captain Black" when on duty and "Conrad" when not.

Yours sincerely,
IAIN MURRAY,
Via email.

Atomic bombshell

Sir,

Sorry about this, but re: Ad Nauseam (1126) and the Audi "Element 120" ad: it's not quite fair to conclude that Audi's ad folk must have flunked their physics on the grounds that "elements with atomic numbers above 103 tend to be unstable and decay spontaneously". As any fule know, scientists predict an "island of stability" for elements with even atomic numbers around 114 to 118. As Element 118 has (allegedly) been found, the next likely stable element would be 120. So maybe the Audi folk knew all this and it's your expert as doesn't know his half-live from his elbow.

Small and pedantic beer, I know. Keep up the good work.

Yours faithfully,
ALASDAIR RICHMOND,
School of Philosophy, Edinburgh.

Latin lover

Gnome Honorabilis!

Libri MCXXV!, Pagina XIII: Pedans Repudiatitur

Omnis Imbecillus Sciet ut "p.p." ante nomen honorabile significant non "per procurationem" sed "participans pro".

ROLAND GRAF,
Via Springfield, Ratae Coritanorum.

Letter from **Iasi**

from Our Own Correspondent

HOW curious! Things actually appear to be improving here in Romania, for so long associated with poverty and seedy dictatorship, and which for much of the 1990s limped far behind our eastern European comrades.

Our new president, former sea captain Traian Basescu, has hardly put a foot wrong since he squeaked in last November. From the urban areas, the younger generation and the business community, most of the free press, not to mention the EU, waves of goodwill wash over the straight-talking, former can-do mayor of Bucharest.

Even swigging from a bottle of champagne after a short, pithy speech and throwing it into a semi-delirious crowd on new year's eve went down well in a keen-on-appearances country. We Romanians had become inured to long, tedious presidential speeches at the start of another year of grinding poverty.

His millionaire prime minister, Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, has appointed a formidable team of young ministers from academia and business. Iasi's own favourite son, Razvan Ungureanu, 37, a historian from our most prestigious university, has made a good impression in Brussels. Finance minister Ionut Popescu, former editor-in-chief of *Capital*, Romania's *FT*, is our Gordon Brown. But the undoubted star is justice minister Monica Macovei. She defends lesbian and gay rights in our religious, conservative country, stresses the rule of law and has a distinguished human rights record in former Yugoslavia.

Only the unkind would dwell on some of the business connections of our new government. Frankly, in a country fighting corruption, we'd rather have wealthy ministers who don't need to trouser the odd billion. And their success could herald the end for the still powerful but now in opposition PSD. Leadership over our unreformed communists, with their mafia-like networks across the country, is the subject of a tug-of-love between Adrian Nastase, the insufferably arrogant, bouffant-haired former prime minister, and Ion Iliescu, the ancient, always smiling ex-president. Nastase has a fondness for shooting our protected bears and getting himself on TV. Iliescu left office with an embarrassing U-turn, obliged to reverse a disgraceful pardon he tried to grant for thuggish miners' leader, Miron Cozma, who led his marauding bands to Bucharest on several occasions when Iliescu was in trouble in the 1990s, smashing buildings and students' heads.

Basescu has his faults. Like many others, he was a Communist in the bad old days. He served as transport minister in the ropey centre-right government in the late 90s. There were questions about the disposal of our merchant fleet. But he did make the trains run on time and he has a good grasp of our place in the world.

His first foreign trip was to neighbouring Chisinau. He got on well with Voronin, the Russian-speaking Communist leader who daftly suggests that Moldavian and Romanian are two separate languages. In Kiev, he was applauded at the swearing-in of President Yushchenko, with whom he shares orange as the party colour. And in Moscow, at least for the moment, he set aside those old resentments of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which resulted in the loss of a third of our territory in 1939, and the loss of Romanian gold which was left for safekeeping in Tsarist Russia before the 1917 revolution. Instead he focused on regional issues, including cooperation in the Black Sea region, which he has singled out as a centre for people-smuggling and drug-running. He was also warmly received in Brussels and London.

But all this good news comes at a price. Desperate for American support, we signed up to the law which will exclude Americans from war crimes in any future conflict. And in Barnova, a few kilometers south of here, the US has built a super-sophisticated new telecommunications centre. Wouldn't this be a great place to lend a hand to US warplanes based in Constanta on the Black Sea should they be thinking of visiting Iran?

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "When you find your calling, you have to go with it," Frank Kelly Rich told reporters from his office in Denver, Colorado, "and back in 1996, when I decided to start a magazine, I felt it should be about the subject I know best. I've always seen alcohol as a boon to mankind, and regard drunks as an oppressed minority, so I wanted to begin a publication aimed specifically at them. And that's why I created *Modern Drunkard*, a glossy, upmarket, bi-monthly magazine for the chronically wasted."

Warming to his theme, the editor drained his gin and tonic, took a bottle of whiskey from the shelf, and continued. "The magazine does so well, because many people think reality is awful, so why not get out of it each and every day? We're now in our tenth year, our circulation is over 50,000, and I get letters of support all the time, not just from drinkers, but from people in Alcoholics Anonymous, who say they like to read it because it reminds them of what

life was like when they used to drink. Some people say we're socially irresponsible, but I think drinking is conducive to a happy family life, and there's a tidal wave of new evidence to show that it's good for your health. Some of the most accomplished people have been drinkers. Look at Hemingway. He was a great literary drunk. Most teetotallers would trade their lives for his in a second. That's the end of the press conference. I am too drunk to think straight."

Critics of the magazine are appalled by its sentiments. "Drinking at the level they promote and saying it's good for you is baloney," declared Wendy Hamilton of Mothers Against Drink Driving. "*Modern Drunkard* is just plain stupid, and I cannot figure out how this magazine makes the world a better place to live in." *(Quad City Times [Iowa], 1/1/05. Spotter: Nick McGeachin)*

– ● –

● *"This was the jury pool from hell," defense attorney Leslie Ballin told a press conference in Memphis, Tennessee, "In thirty years of courtroom work, I've never encountered such a group of misfits, junkies, and deadbeats before. Why were they ever invited in the first place?*

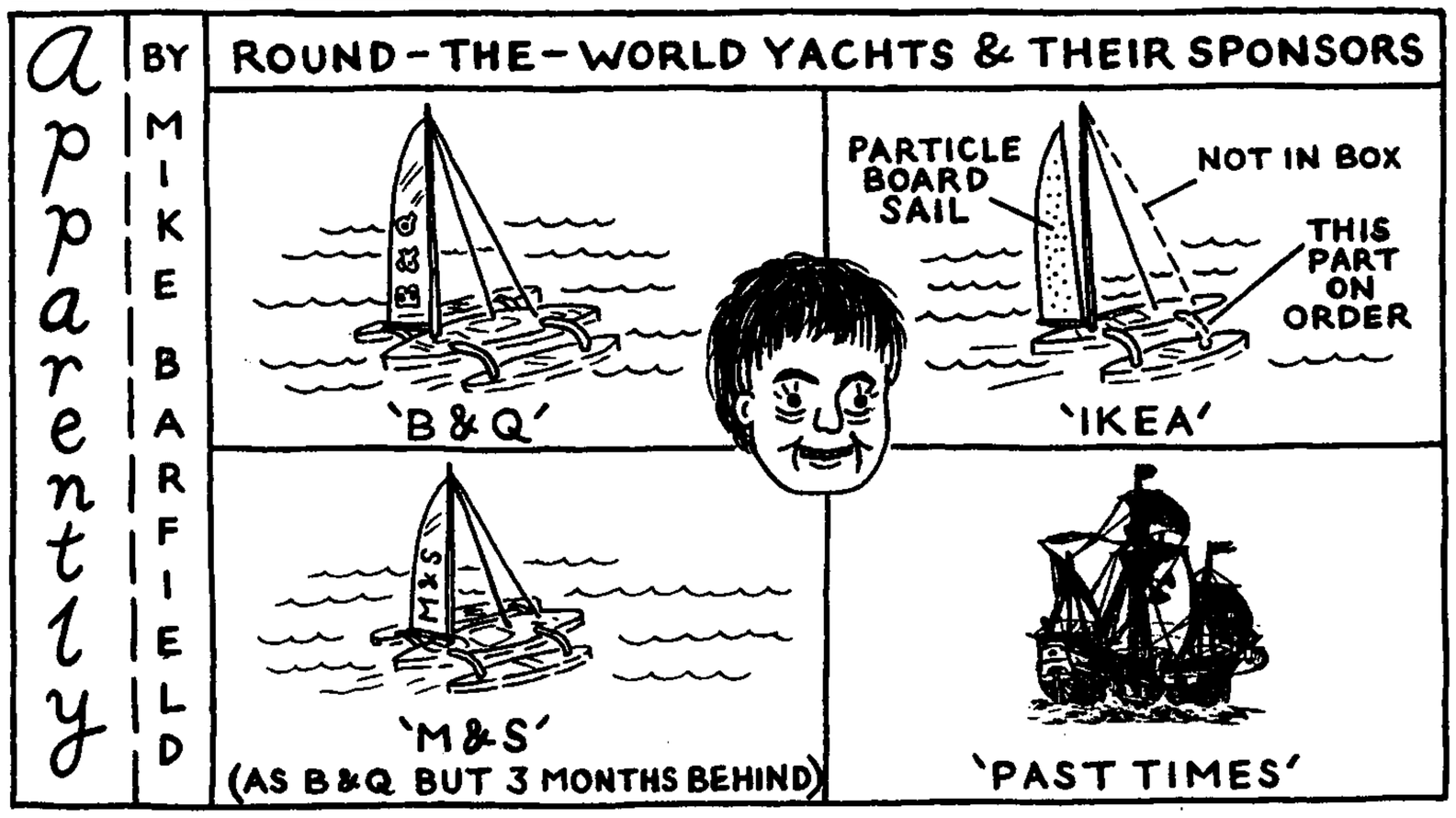
"Right after jury selection began, one man stood up and announced 'I'm on morphine and I'm flying higher than a kite,' so he was asked to leave. Then, when the prosecutor asked if anyone had ever been convicted of a crime, one man said that he'd been once been arrested and put in a mental hospital after shooting his nephew in the head because he wouldn't come out from under the bed. He wasn't selected either. Two women admitted convictions for theft, one man admitted to several arrests for indecent exposure, and another man said he'd once been arrested for soliciting sex from an undercover police officer. 'I should have known something was up,' he told us, 'because she had all her own teeth.' They were all asked to leave. Then another potential juror said that perhaps he shouldn't be on the jury either, because 'in my neighbourhood, everyone knows that if you get Mr Ballin as you're lawyer, that means you're guilty.' He too was not chosen."

When a jury was eventually assembled, Ballin's client was found not guilty. (Seattle Times, 19/1/05. Spotter: James Macintyre)

– ● –

● "Our teachings help lesbians and gays to make important life decisions," psychologist Hong Kwai-wah told a seminar on Sexual Wholeness in Hong Kong, "and those who criticise us are anti-choice. This is not discrimination, we are simply helping the sexually confused to face the problems they have, and showing them that it's a misconception to say they cannot change. Because we've proved time and again that lesbianism can be cured, if women will simply embrace their female identity by saying goodbye to girlfriends, putting on a dress, wearing lipstick and cosmetics, and buying some high-heel shoes."

The seminar, organised by The Society for Truth and Light, was advising social workers on how to give counselling to gay men and women, and was criticised by Bella Luk of Amnesty International. "Suggesting that all gay men are feminine and all lesbian women are masculine is stereotyping. And suggesting that wearing dresses, affecting a high pitched voice, putting on make-up, and wearing high heels will change a lesbian's sexual orientation would be laughable if it wasn't so dangerous. Homosexuality is not the problem. They are." *(South China Morning Post, 30/12/04. Spotter: Rhonda Palmer)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

You've all probably by now seen the handsome new signboard which Mr Milburn has put up outside the church "Forwards Not Backwards"!

But I wonder how many of you have taken a few minutes off to meditate on what it really means!

Because, judging by the way some people talk, they would be only too happy to go backwards rather than forwards, which is obviously ridiculous!

And let me give you one very good example of why going backwards is the daftest thing we could do!

In the olden days you weren't allowed to be locked up in your own house without any evidence!

In the 21st Century, doesn't that seem totally absurd?

That sort of thing was all very well for the days of bows and arrows, Kings and Knights, Magna Cartas and Habeas Corpuses – but honestly.

We really have to be a bit more modern than that, don't we?

Just think how many superstitious beliefs people used to have in the Middle Ages.

They even used to believe in something called 'trial by jury'! Doesn't that sound like something from some fusty old textbook, probably written down on parchment, whatever that was!

Imagine it. They thought that they could just go out into the street and round up 12 ordinary people, none of whom were members of the PCC, and that they could decide whether someone had done wrong or not!

How much more sensible it is to leave all that sort of thing to the experts like Mr Clarke of the Neighbourhood Watch.

Forwards not backwards, you see!

Which brings me to my fifth point!

If there's one thing more than anything else which I've seen as my top priority since I took over as your vicar in 1997, it is that I must always put the wellbeing of my parishioners first!

You remember in the Good Book there's a lot of talk about shepherds?

Can any of the children tell me what a shepherd is?

No, Rafik, he's not a halal butcher, but near!

Anyone else? Madison, no it's not a type of German dog, although that was a good guess!

No? Well, let me tell you. A shepherd in the old days was a person whose job was to go out into the fields and round up the sheep.

And then, if he was a good shepherd, and looking after their interest, he would

bring them back home at night and make sure that they were safely locked up, to protect them from foxes!

Not that I've got anything against foxes, of course, which do a very useful job in their own way, keeping down the numbers of chickens, ducks and lambs!

But the point is, and this is my seventh final point, if you imagine that not all foxes are good, and that some might be 'suicide foxes', trying to sneak in amongst the sheep to kill them all, then you will see why it makes perfect sense to lock up the sheep and let the foxes go about their business free from discrimination.

Or is it the other way round?

Anyway, the important point is that we go forward, not backwards, as I have made clear by writing a rousing new chorus which we shall be singing at next Sunday's evening service.

Forwards, not backwards
That's the way to go
Forwards, not backwards,
Fast not slow.

Forwards, not backwards,
The future, not the past
Forwards, not backwards
Then it's going to last!

Forwards, not backwards
It's the only way, you know!
Forwards, not backwards,
'Ere we go, 'ere we go, 'ere we go!

Words and music, T Blair

Tony

Mr Brown takes the parish begging bowl to far-off China! As pictured by local artist, Mr de la Nougerede.

Banns of Marriage

We are happy to publish the Banns of Marriage between Charles Frederick Ponsonby de la Vere Windsor of this parish, and his long-term partner, Miss Camilla Deirdre Delilah Jezebel Parker-Knoll, one-time spinster, also of this parish. If anyone knows of any more reasons why these two should not be joined in holy matrimony, could they keep them to themselves, as Mr Falconer has had enough trouble with this one as it is. For parishioners' information, Mr Falconer had made it clear that the Human Rights Act 2005 allows anyone the right to do anything, so long as the vicar approves it. Which in this case I do! T.B.

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

As a former incumbent of this parish, I would like to say how not inconsiderably shocked I am to see the collapse in standards under the present incumbent. Oh yes. And the behaviour of his friend Mr Campbell in particular, as he goes round the parish with his spray can writing obscenities on the bus shelter, is to my mind in no small measure morally repugnant. And as I said to my wife Norma over breakfast

Yours faithfully
Rev. J. Major (Vicar of Albion's 1990-7)
Maastricht Road.

(The editor reserves the right to cut all letters from former incumbents who've got the nerve to go around preaching about morality when they were shagging the knickers off Mrs Currie. A.C.)

BRINGING PEACE TO THE HOLY LAND

The vicar's outreach mission to Palestine is going terribly well.

This week there is an unprecedented peace conference in St Albion's bringing together both sides in this long-running conflict except for one of them.

Under the chairmanship of the vicar, there is every chance that the one side will agree with itself and real progress will be made.

T.B

PEKING DAILY
Friday 4 March 2005
1 Yuan

BROWN CRITICISED OVER HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

by Our Political Staff **Pee Toe Baw**

THERE was embarrassment today as visiting British dignitary Gordon Brown was forced to defend his country's record on Human Rights in response to protests from Chinese officials.

Brown had been hoping to concentrate on trade issues and raise his profile as a world statesman suitable to take over from the current dictator, Tony Blair.

Instead he was forced to defend the new policy of House Arrest where innocent civilians are detained without trial in their homes on the say so of a member of the British Politburo (Charles Clarke).

Gordon Riots

An angry Brown lashed out at his Chinese hosts saying, "We have an honourable tradition in our country that we do not insult a foreign visitor – we just lock him up."

Full story p. 94.

POPE 'IN GOOD HEALTH – BUT DEAD' Vatican Latest

VATICAN officials today confirmed that His Holiness the Pope *(cont. p. 94)*

SALLY JOCKSTRAP
The Voice Of Sport

HATS off to England's World-Beating Rugby heroes! Once again, they have won the British Open in Dubai! Who says we can't play football?

● SPARE a thought for poor old Chelsea – beaten by the Welsh in a nail-biting photo finish at Aintree. No wonder Tim Henman is looking for another club to play for!

● AS the Grand Prix season gets off to a flying start at the Sheffield Crucible, who do I tip? Why, Frankie Dettori of course!

© Sally Jockstrap, winner *Sportswriter of the Year* at the British Press Awards 2006.

THE BOOK THAT NO-ONE WANTS TO READ

EXCLUSIVE TO PRIVATE EYE

THE INSIDER DEALER

The Secret Diaries of Piers Moron

PIERS MORON is Fleet Street's Best-Known Moron. Controversial, acerbic, but most of all moronic, Moron edited the Daily Moron for nearly 2 years before being sacked for being a moron.

Moron was at the hub of British political, social and moronic life. He knew everyone, he met everyone – prime ministers, soap stars, royalty, city analysts, policemen, officials from the Department of Trade and Industry, security men giving him a plastic bag and throwing him out of the door.

Here are his sensational insider verdicts on some of the top movers and shakers in Britain with whom he rubbed shoulders during his years at the Moron:

● **Tony Blair: *"A bit slippery".***

● **Alastair Campbell: *"Foul-mouthed bully".***

● **Peter Mandelson: *"Probably gay".***

● **Diana: *"Mixed-up Royal".***

● **Gazza: *"Drunk footballer".***

● **Jeremy Clarkson: *"Likes cars".***

Now read Moron's incredible account of meeting Prime Minister's wife, Cherie Blair.

May 7th 1997

I AM invited round for drinks at Downing Street. Me, Piers Moron, Fleet Street's red-top rogue, going round to see the Prime Minister! Amazing! The Prime Minister is incredibly friendly. "Hello, Moron," he says. "Would you like a knighthood? Or just a beer?" We had a good laugh about this, but then his wife Cherie came in. I could tell from the first minute she fancied me rotten. The sexual chemistry was unbelievable. But she cleverly disguised her feelings for me by trying to put me down. "Are you from the Daily Moron?" she said. "Your paper is moronic, and so are you." Tony was visibly furious with her and burst out laughing to cover up her faux-pas. "You're right," he said. "He is a total moron, but we need his support."

Tomorrow: How Cherie tried to bed me and so did Diana and so did Gazza.

Reprinted from *Insider Dealer*, £19.99, The Moron Press.

The Alternative Rocky Horror Service Book

No. 94 A Service for the Fudging of the Schism

President: Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in a very real sense to say as little as possible about sincerely held differences of opinion that exist between members of our Anglican community over a matter that we do not wish to talk about.

(Here he may call upon representatives of the two parties to come forward.)

President: Do you, Bishop Onanugu, from the Church of the Holy Exorcist in Lagos, agree to be quiet for the next 3 years in the hope that the whole thing will blow over?

Bishop Onanugu: I don't.

President: And do you, Bishop Marvyn de Lumberjack from the Church of the Village People in Moosejam also agree to be quiet for the next 3 years?

Bishop de Lumberjack: I don't.

President: And will you further agree to love, honour and respect one another and your differing traditions for as long as you both shall live?

Both: No, we won't.

President: We will now give each other a sign of peace.

(The Bishops then exchange solemn blows in the sight of the congregation.)

President: We will now sing the Hymn of Thanksgiving for our deliverance from schism.

(All sing Hymn no. 94.)

HYMN

'Fight the good Fight.

We both think we're right.'

DISMISSAL

The Archbishop of Canterbury *(for it is he)*: I think that all went very well.

Bishops: Get lost, beardie!

© *Nothing in Common Worship, 2005*

POLLY FILLER

ONCE again, half-term has been ruined by the dreaded school project! Toddler Charlie is supposed to be having some much-needed time off after a hectic first half of term at St Tweazles School For Gifted Children With Learning Difficulties! And what do they do? Give him a project which involves building a robot! In a week? Pu-lease!!

How on earth do they expect busy working mothers (some of whom have columns to write about the hell of half-term for their forthcoming collection *'We're In The Mummy!'*, Johnson & Pearson, £17.95!!) to drop everything and spend a week finding toilet rolls and tissue boxes and turning them into lovingly modelled robots?!!

It's ok for the stay-at-home mums with their part-time Art degrees and their little jobs helping out in the charity shop and their big ideas about starting up an on-line baby clothes business which are never going to happen. (No offence, but you know I'm right, girls!!) *They've* got all the time in the world to get out the sellotape and turn out something marvellous, ie cheat on behalf of their lazy offspring.

And it's alright too for the lucky children who don't have useless dads who spend the entire half-term watching Channel Four's 100 Best Celebrity Autopsies with Dr Gutner Von Haas and Jimmy Carr!! (No names, Useless Simon, but you know who you are!!)

ROLLO's dad, for example, is an architect and, would you believe it, Rollo turned up at school with a perfectly crafted model of R2-D2 from Star Wars with swivelling head and moveable feet!

Impressive! But did little Rollo build this all on his own? I think not.

No! In the Filler household we've made an ethical decision. Charlie's parents are *not* going to do his school project for him.

The au-pair is. And, luckily, Elska has a degree in Animatronics from the Ukraine's Instituta Tecknologika and has helped Charlie to construct a fully-automated warrior droid with a laser-missile-guidance system – which, incidentally, blew up Rollo's pathetic apology for a robot along with most of the art room!!!

A+ for Charlie, I think, Miss Jarvis!!

© P. Filler.

'RADICAL PLAN TO CHANGE NOTHING'

Kelly Spells It Out

by Our Education Staff Lunchtime O'Level

THE WORLD of learning was rocked last night by Education Secretary Ruth Kelly who announced wide-ranging proposals to completely reform not very much.

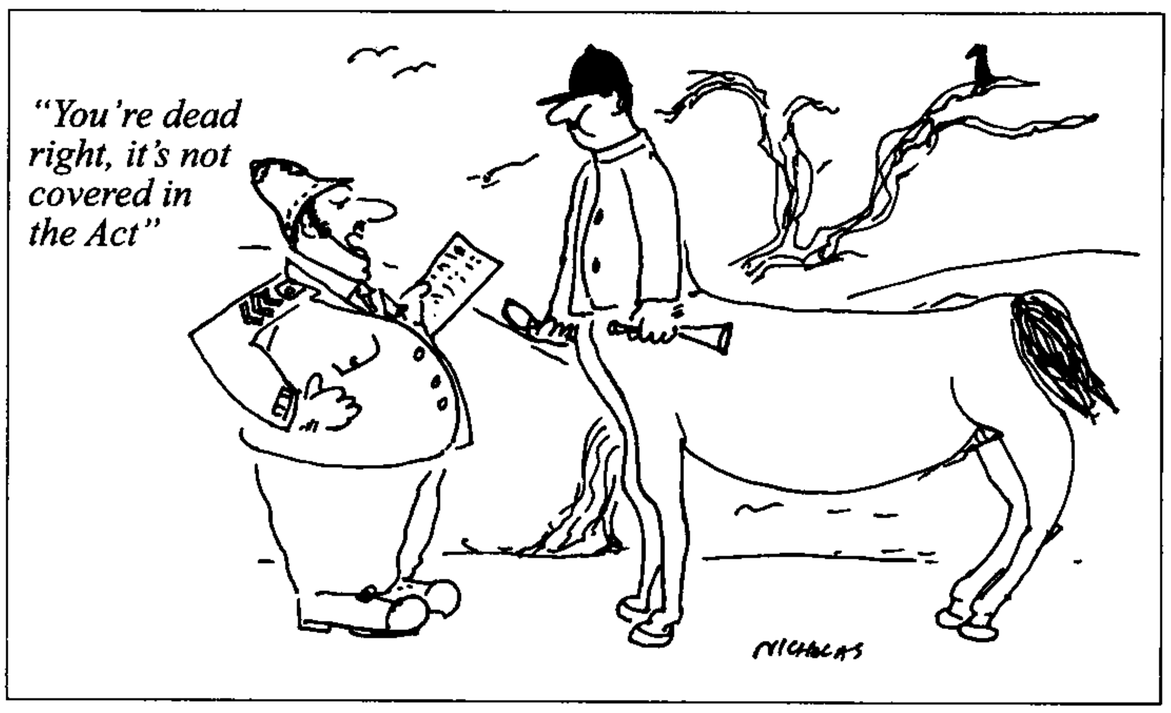
"This is a colossal non-shake-up," she said, "and nothing will ever be the same again except everything."

Ruth Kelly's amazing, once-in-a-lifetime, educational revolution includes:

- **GCSEs to be replaced by new-style GCSEs.**
- **A-Levels to be remodelled along the lines of the old A-Levels.**
- **Vocational qualifications to be replaced by new-look "vocational qualifications".**
- **Pupils to be encouraged to stay on at school rather than the present system of being encouraged to stay on at school.**

Said a confident Ms Kelly, "I am determined not to fail and, as usual, neither will anyone else."

Ruth Kelly is 17.



ROYAL MAIL TO LOSE MONOPOLY

by Our Industrial Staff **Quentin Letters**

THE ROYAL MAIL was shocked last night at the news that it had lost its coveted monopoly.

Said a spokesman "We don't know where it's gone to. It's probably been directed to another postal service that is spelt differently, or possibly it wouldn't fit through the door and it's still in the local sorting office."

Last Post

He continued "It's always possible that an unscrupulous postal operative has stolen our monopoly. They may have seen how much money was in it and decided to take it for themselves. We just don't know for sure."

He concluded, "Our only remaining hope is that the monopoly will turn up somewhere in Britain and some kind person will redeliver it to us in one piece. It is a very valuable package and we are very upset that it has gone astray."

The Royal Mail is 198.

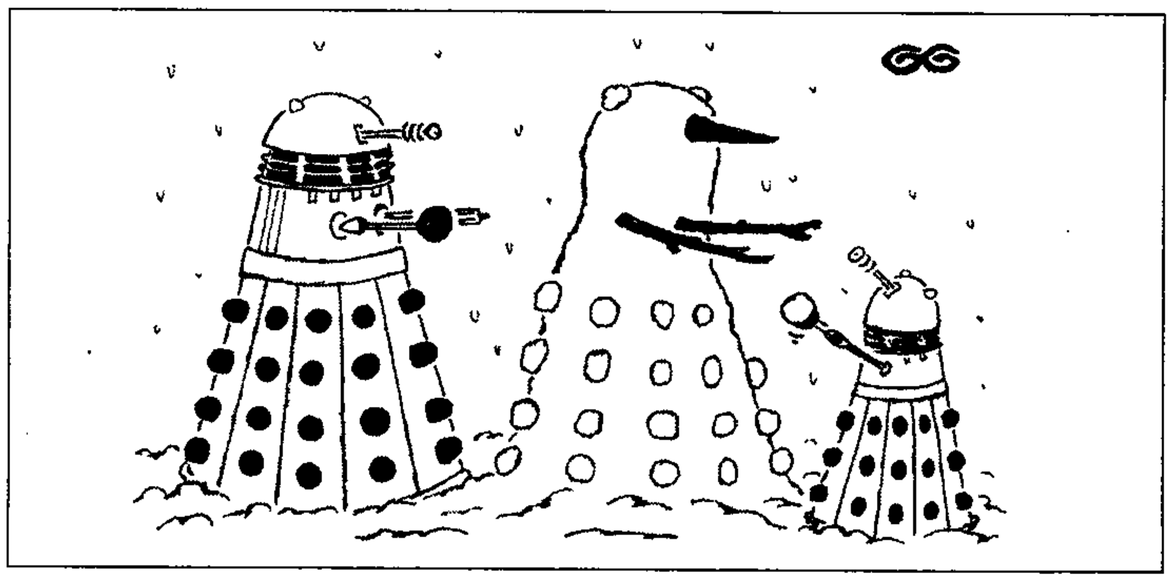
HOUSE ARREST DEFENDED

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

THE controversial decision to detain 'The Prevention of Terrorism Act' under House of Lords arrest has been defended by peers.

"We have acted now because we have evidence that this Act intends to be used by an extremist Home Secretary, who can only be referred to as C, to attack basic civil liberties in Britain," said a senior member of the Lords. "We have evidence that C has links to a known terror government and is capable of carrying out his threats to lock people up without trial."

The Government, however, defended the decision to place this bill under House of Lords arrest, saying this simply wouldn't deter other even worse anti-terror bills from coming onto the statute books.



GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S TERRORIST THREAT

■ HATS OFF – and dresses too – to Esther Rantzen, TV's glamorous granny!!???! She may be all of 64, but this OAP is not afraid to show what she's made of!!??!? And, blimey, don't she look great in her fishnet tights and high heels???!! No wonder all the geezers are a-droolin' and a-dribblin' at the sight of Esther a-sportin' and a-cavortin' in the altogether!!???! And no wonder the Naomis, the Kylies and the Zetas are eating their hearts out!!???! Talk about a glamour bombshell???!! You've said it, Mister!!???!

■ ESTHER RANTZEN!!!? Who does she think she is???!! A-posin' and a-poutin' like she was a Kylie or a Zeta!!??! She's old enough to be everybody's granny!!?! And no wonder her middle-aged children are burying their heads in shame at the sight of this sad old lady trying to turn the geezers on with her fishnet tights and stiletto heels!!?! 'That's Life' used to be your catchphrase 100 years ago, Esther!!??! All you're good for now is a walk-on role in One Foot In The Grave!!??! Geddit!!???!

■ *HERE HE IS!!! Glenda's February Fellah – Cruz Beckham – Cruzy name, Cruzy guy!!!??!!*

Byeeee!!!

Nursery Times

Friday, 4 March, 2005

'DON'T ASK ME ABOUT HUGH GRUNT!' Jemima's Plea

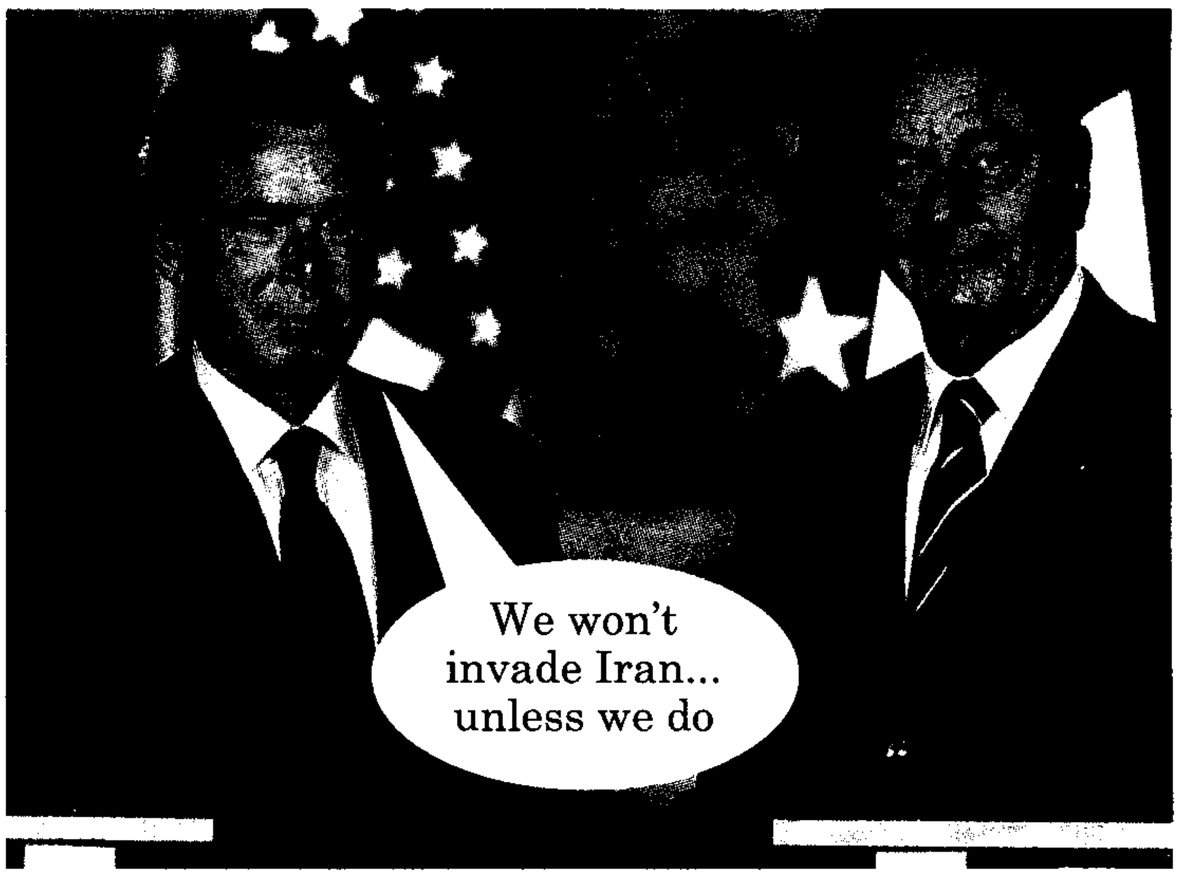
by Our Court Staff
Hans Moslem Andersen

LOVELY JEMIMA Puddleduck, the daughter of billionaire shark Sir Jams Goldfish, today told the Nursery Times, "I am happy to talk about my charity work, but I am not prepared to discuss my private life."

In recent weeks, Jemima's name has been linked to pig about town Hugh Grunt after the collapse of her long-standing union with Mr Imran Fox.

But this topic is out of bounds, as Jemima makes clear. "I do a lot of work for disadvantaged ducklings," she told me. "They are so sweet and it is a crime that they get eaten by people like Mr Fox."

BUSH REASSURES EUROPE



My eBay

forgottenitagain (666)

Items I'm Bidding On (1-3 of 3 items)

		Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐	**Burglar alarm – safe, secure, easy to install**	£49.99	£10.00	1
☐	**Baseball bat, regulation weight**	£19.99	£20.00	1
☐	**Costume jewellery, assorted lot**	£5.00	£2.50	1

Items I'm Selling (1-4 of 4 items)

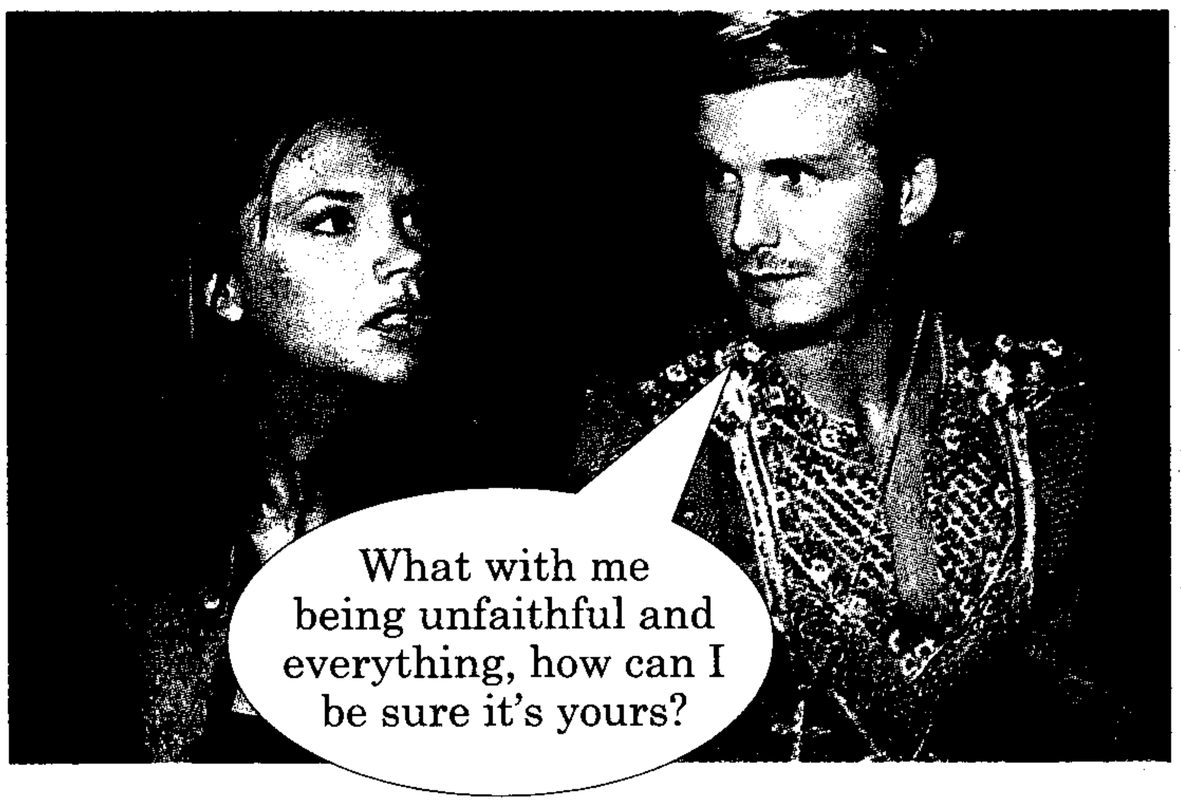
		Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐	**Cocktail shaker (unwanted gift) 1**	£2.99	£1.00	0
☐	**DVD 'Fame Academy' (bought in error)**	£4.99	£2.50	0
☐	**2 self-help books – 'Enrich Your Vocabulary', 'Increase Your Memory Power' – as new**	£2.00	£1.00	0
☐	**Quad bike, one owner, slightly dented**	£50.00	Buyer to collect	0

"BOO! HISSS! GET OFF THE STAGE AND TAKE YOUR DUMMY WITH YOU!
..GOTTLED THE PEACE PROCESS ...GOTTLED THE PEACE PROCESS
IRA
TONITE GERRY & PO'NEIL
GLENN KEATS
IRA

CINEMA
CALL AUSTRALIA
AND GO ON AND ON AND ON FOR 5p AN HOUR
COMING SOON! THE FILM THAT WILL SHOCK!
IT HAD TO BE MADE!
9 SONGS
DIRECTED BY MICHAEL WINTERBOTTOM
REAL! SEXUAL INTERCOURSE!
LOVEMAKING AS IT REALLY IS!
SEE! THEM AT IT!
'HAUNTING!'

"Let's hope it lasts more than three minutes!"

BECKHAM BABY SHOCK



ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

KEN LIVINGSTONE

Do you have any favourite spoons?

You're a bloody Nazi aren't you?

Would you say spoons play a significant part in your job as Mayor?

You're just like those concentrations camp guards – you're just obeying orders aren't you?

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

Fuck off you little Hitler!

We apologise for the reduced length of the Spoon Interview this issue due to circumstances beyond our control.

NEXT WEEK: *Tom Cruise - Me And My Cruise.*

Camilla's Escorts
A Touch of Class

Advertisement (Adult services), News Shopper

GIRL GETS DRUNK ON 19TH BIRTHDAY SHOCK

STUNNING NEWS emerged last night, when it was revealed that a girl had got drunk on her nineteenth birthday.

A source close to the girl said, "I'm truly shocked by this. The amount of times this kind of thing happens on a 19-year-old's birthday can be counted on the legs of a millipede."

Charlotte Church is 19.

FICTIONAL TV CHARACTER MURDERED

THE NATION was in shock last night, when it was revealed that a fictional television character had been murdered.

One viewer said, "I was truly stunned by the shocking turn of events, despite the fact that I'd already read about it six weeks ago in my weekly soap magazine."

Dirty Den is not real.

COUPLE HAVE BABY

A COUPLE with two children had another one. *(Reuters)*

BUSH MEETS SCHROEDER

the PREMIERSH*TS

Paul Woods

STAND UP SPEAK UP
SPONSORED BY
I LOVE FOOTBALL
AND YET I AM STILL ABUSED
I NEED YOUR VOICE TO DROWN OUT THE CAPITALISTS
OI YOU! GET BACK TO WORK!
ASIAN SWEAT-SHOPS

BORN NOT TO BE QUEEN

by DAME SYLVIE KRIN, author of Love In The Saddle, Born To Be Queen, Heir of Sorrows and La Dame Aux Camillas

THE STORY SO FAR: At last Charles and Camilla have named the day!

Now read on...

OUTSIDE, the famous organic gardens of Highgrove House were wreathed in a veil of virgin snow.

But inside the Purple Drawing Room, where a welcoming log fire crackled in the original Adam Nicolson inglenook, all was aglow with warmth.

Sprawled on a chaise-longue, Camilla happily inhaled on a full-strength Portsmouth Hoe untipped cigarette as she gazed longingly at the pages of the Brides R Us catalogue from Saga, with its tantalisingly beautiful variety of wedding ensembles, including The Mature Bride, Second Time Round and Never Too Late.

At last, her fondest dream was coming true!

Charles had finally "popped the question", down on one knee for what seemed an eternity, thanks to a sudden attack of his arthritis.

Camilla relived in her mind how she had playfully kept him in suspense, by saying immediately "Of course, Chazza, you idiot, I thought you'd never ask!"

"Ah, what memories," she pondered, exhaling a stream of joyous smoke which floated lazily towards the French window.

Her eyes followed the wreathing blue coils outside to where a crisp blanket of snow shrouded Charles's prized Pagoda of All The Faiths, with its minarets glittering in the pale winter sun.

But here and there, shyly peeping above the snow, were the purples, yellows and pinks of the first crocuses of spring – the harbingers of new life and happier times ahead.

There they were, just as Charles had described them that morning, "raising their little heads in a sort of, you know, hymn of praise and thanksgiving".

And there had been so much for her to be thankful for since the day the great news was announced to the world.

The bouquets of flowers. The dozens of cards from well-wishers. The hundreds of letters of support. The touchingly scrawled post-card from someone in Switzerland, showing a charming picture of the head-quarters of the Banque des Egyptiens, with the humorous message, "The Duke of Edinburgh will try and fuggin' kill you, signed A Friend".

But best of all, mused Camilla, was the fact that at last Her Majesty the Queen had given her royal approval to their match.

After all the years of Royal snubs and slights, at last she was going to be part of the family – Charles's wife no less!

Charles had told her as much himself. "Mater's finally come round," he had announced. "She's all for it.

"She said we couldn't go on with things as they were. The whole situation was messy. No one knew what to call you, or where to sit you at dinner, that sort of thing, which is *so* important."

So, there it was! A Royal Wedding! And where would it be? Obviously, it couldn't be St Paul's again. So it must be the Abbey! And perhaps a coach along the Mall. Her heart beat faster at the very thought. Crowds cheering. Bands playing. It was all going to be such fun...

"IT's all going to be such fun," said a curiously jittery Charles that evening, as they waited for Sir Alan Fitztightly to announce that dinner was served.

"There's going to be five of us, which is so much better than having hundreds of people one doesn't even know," he hurriedly went on.

"What are you talking about, Chazza? The Abbey holds thousands."

"Er, yes, old thing. It's not exactly going to be in the Abbey. The trouble is that, since I'm going to be head of the Church, it's all got rather complicated. D'you see what I'm getting at, old thing?"

"No, I don't!" Camilla responded sharply, fiddling impatiently with her turquoise-and-zircon engagement ring from Ratners of Belgravia and the Edgware Road.

"So, where's the venue then? Not that boring old chapel at Windsor with all those moth-eaten flags?"

"Oh, no, not there, obviously not," Charles stammered.

"Well, where?" she demanded. "I can't think of any other decent churches."

"Ah, you've hit the nail on the head there, old thing, and it's for that reason and that alone that mater and pater and, of course I, think that..."

Charles paused as he nervously took a bite from a Duchy of Cornwall badger-flavoured organic twiglet. "You know, it's nothing to be ashamed of, a registry office, the ceremony is much the same, it's just a bit quicker than hanging about in a church with all those hymns and, er, er..."

Charles finally ran out of steam and ground to a halt as the silence between him and his bride-to-be deepened and widened to fill the room like a dark and plangent thundercloud. Charles again tried to find words to reassure his consort, but he could not meet her eyes as they welled with tears of bitter disappointment.

"And it'll be so much more intimate with just the two of us and the boys – though probably not Harry actually, although he's promised to come on to the pub afterwards for the reception..."

As her dreams collapsed around her like a soap bubble bursting when it flies too high, Camilla clung to one final scintilla of hope.

At least her union with her beloved Charles would be graced by the presence of the Queen of England.

"But your mother will be there, surely?" she pleaded, her voice tinged with desperation.

"Er, there is a bit of a problem with this protocol thingie... and we've got to do it by the book and apparently they've discovered that the Queen can't go to a registry office if she doesn't want to... it's the Marriage Act of eighteen forty-something..." Charles put out his hand to calm her. "Anyway, it doesn't matter. The most important thing is that *you* will be there."

"I wouldn't count on it," Camilla snapped, throwing the bowl of organic twiglets in the Charles's face as she turned on her heel and stormed from the room.

"Dinner is served," announced Sir Alan who had entered the room. "Will it be just the one tonight?"

Outside, the snow turned to sleet and an icy wind whipped the head off the crocuses, scattering the petals like so much unwanted confetti...

To be continued...

Evening Standard
LONDON, FRIDAY, 4 MARCH, 2005

BLOW TO MIDDLE EAST PEACE TALKS AS KEN REFUSES TO APOLOGISE

by Our Entire Staff **VERONICA TWADDLEY**

THE WORLD trembled on the brink of war today as London mayor Ken Livingstone stubbornly refused to apologise for comparing an Evening Standard reporter to a Nazi concentration camp guard.

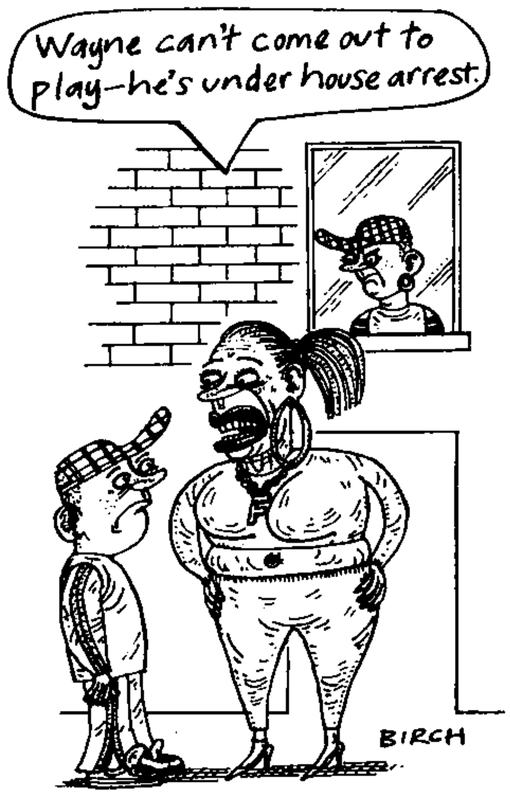
As fury raged through the capitals of the world, from Tel Aviv to Baghdad, from Lagos to Reykjavik, the threat of global conflagration drew ever nearer.

Said one expert, "Unless Ken says sorry to the Evening Standard by tomorrow, nuclear armageddon will be unleashed."

He continued, "Ken Livingstone is trying to wipe out the human race and, even worse, his behaviour is affecting house prices in the capital – see our sister paper the Daily Mail for full details."

ON OTHER PAGES: More stuff about Red Ken 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 94

QUEEN SNUBS WEDDING



BLAIR APOLOGISES TO THE SUDAN 1

THE PRIME MINISTER apologised yesterday to the Sudan One. He said that there had been no proof that they had contaminated millions of food products and that their withdrawal from shelves had been an appalling miscarriage of justice for which he personally was very sorry indeed.

FOOD SCARE LATEST

by Our Environment Staff **Sue Danwun**

CONSUMERS were warned today to check the labels of their supermarket ready meals carefully, after some were found to contain traces of food.

"This substance known as food has been linked to cancer, obesity, heart disease and flatulence," warned a food standards agency spokesman. "We can't allow dangerous substances such as food into the food chain."

However, supermarket groups tried to play down the scare, saying the amounts of food present in these meals were so tiny that they wouldn't pose any threat to health."

CAMILLA (Rom.) huntress taught by her father METABUS; warrior and friend of DIANA

Quickway Crossword Dictionary (1988)

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Hunter Thompson

So. Farewell
Then Hunter
Thompson,
Famous author.

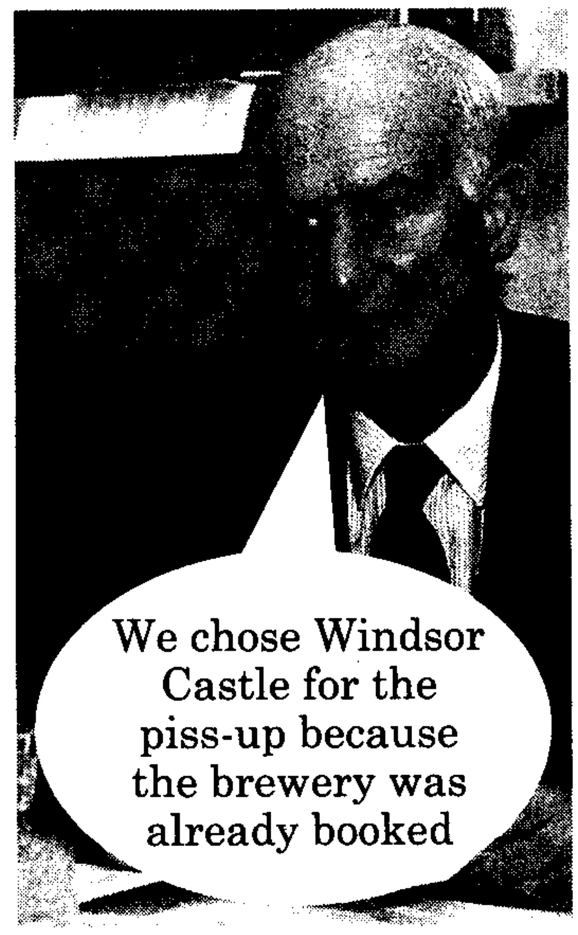
You wrote a
Book about
The Beatles.

Or perhaps
That was
Hunter Davies.

I shall
Never know.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

ROYAL ADVISERS DEFEND WEDDING PLANS



1984 by George Orwell (Chapter 94)

THE Prime Minister defended the new stringent anti-terror laws proposed by his government, saying that outlawing thought crime was the only way to protect civil liberty in Britain.

"People need to remember that the war with Iraq is over, but the war with Oceania is just beginning," said Big Tony

(cont. p. 94)

DIARY

ANNE DIAMOND

I'd been crying all night. Sobbing my heart out, strewing sodden Kleenexes all over the floor. But I fought back from despair.

It took all the courage I could muster to appear before those breakfast television cameras all bright and breezy, that nation's favourite the girl next door.

To millions of ordinary viewers, I was the most famous and glamorous person in the world, bigger than Marilyn Monroe, who anyway some argued was dead. But inside, I was hurting.

Men! They were always letting me down. Bubbly Steve from "Good Morning Cornwall", who'd romanced me royally – before going back to his wife. Smashing Damian from "Have Another Biscuit, Berkshire" who'd smothered me with flowers and kisses – before going back to his wife. Handsome Geoff from "Elevenses from Edinburgh", who bought me designer lingerie from a top store in London's fashionable Old Kent Road before (you've guessed it!) going back to his wife.

One minute I would be romancing top Hollywood hunks, dating politicians and rock stars and lunching with Royalty – the next I would be fighting back from despair as yet another man went back to his wife.

So when a deeply dishy guy – a former Prime Minister who I will never to name but who was a silver-haired bachelor with a yacht, a grand piano and a contacts book to die for, and who had been literally huge in the Seventies – phoned and invited me to fight back from despair with him over a candlelit dinner for two at his multi-million-pound designer mansion in Salisbury, I accepted in a jiffy.

"Champagne, smoked salmon, all the trimmings – and hang the expense! How does that sound?" he asked, seductively. Yes, he certainly knew how to treat a lady.

I arrived at his front door looking a million dollars in a Prada dress that would have given my poor bank manager the proverbial nightmares!

The former Prime Minister who I'll never name – he once confided to me in his deep voice that he'd faced two elections in a single year! – opened the door barefoot, wearing nothing but a designer bathrobe and a huge grin.

"I've just had a sensuous, relaxing power-shower" he purred. "Come on in, darling – the Moet is on ice. And, by the way, Anne – you look gorgeous."

Over champagne, we discussed politics, world affairs, Europe. He told me how he was fighting back from despair after being dreadfully let down by a woman who'd run off with his job. I told him that to the rest of the world I may look brilliantly successful, with the looks and the charm to match, but inside I was fighting back from despair.

We cried a lot, and laughed a lot, and then fell into each other's arms.

"Now, my darling" he said, leading me up the designer stairs, "Let's put you first for once". He then scooped me into his arms, carried me to his bedroom and treated me to a reading from his collected speeches, 1970-74.

In the wee small hours of the morning, we kissed and said goodbye. I pulled on my designer heels and teetered away. It had been a wonderful night, and now I could return to the TV-AM sofa, feeling every inch a top-rated celebrity, ready to sparkle and delight the nation as always.

I may have made it look easy, but presenting the top-rated "Wakey Wakey Britain" was acknowledged as one of the toughest jobs in the whole world.

One minute, I would have to ask top singer Vince Hill about his fabulous new album – and the next I would be quizzing top politician Fred Mulley about his smashing new policy initiative. It was vital I didn't mix the two guys up, or their answers might come out all muddled.

If ever there was a major natural disaster – an earthquake or a plane crash, with many hundreds feared dead – I'd have to remember not to smile so much, out of respect for the families. But, then again, if the disaster was particularly dreadful, I'd sometimes smile just that little bit more, to help put a bit of sunshine back in their lives. Then every few minutes I would have to look at the right camera and say, "We'll be back with more – after the break".

And if it we were due for the weather from Trish, I'd have to remember to say, "And now over to Trish – for the weather."

The pressure was unbearable, and don't let anyone kid you it wasn't.

Presenting Good Morning Britain was like rescuing over three hundred innocent men, women and children from a burning house under sustained enemy fire every single day – then going back with a wounded leg and blood pouring from your head to rescue three hundred more. And all the time having to wear a sunny smile.

Looking back, I should have twigged that Mike Hollingsworth was married the moment he said he had a wife. But it truly never crossed my mind.

Life with Mike was a roller-coaster. One minute, I was in despair. The next minute, I was fighting my way back from despair. And the next minute, I would be in despair again.

I first met him when I was presenting the "Time for a Nice Cuppa" slot on ATV's top-rated "Start the Day in Birmingham" programme. The chief presenter, Carol, had sadly broken her leg after falling over a banana skin that had fallen accidentally out of my handbag. I was desperate to help her out by stepping into her shoes, so she wouldn't be missed.

That very morning, a colleague introduced Mike to me as our new producer.

When he touched my face I felt an instant surge, like a bolt of electricity.

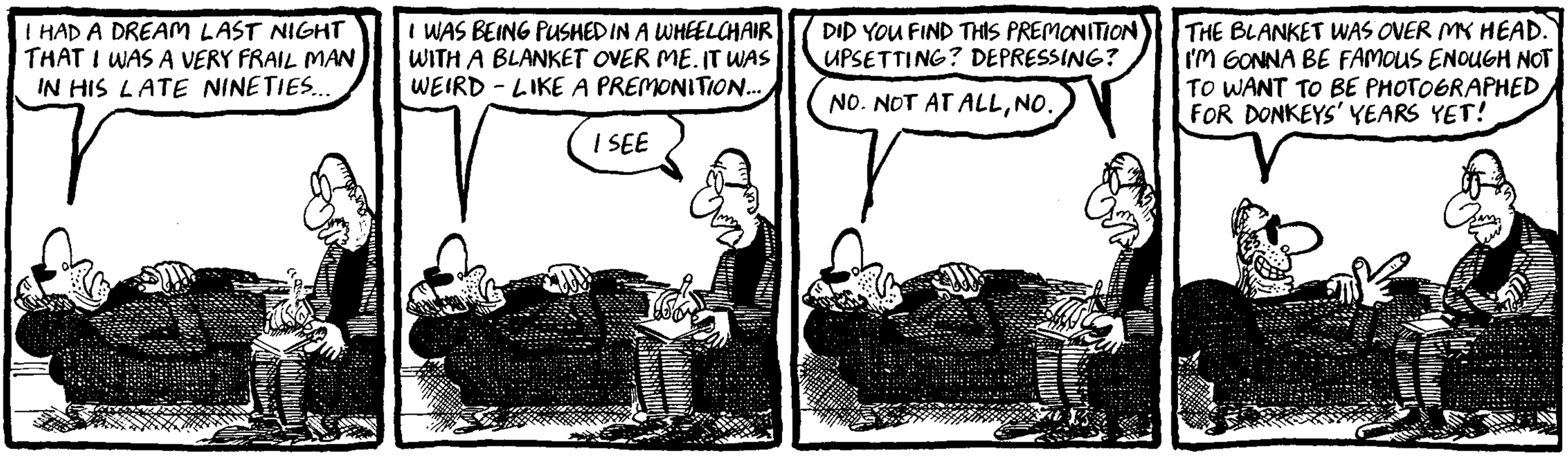
It turned out he always used a cattle-prod on his presenters, because it got the best out of them. I knew then and there that here was a man I'd follow anywhere.

Two years later, I was married to Mike and we were living the Hollywood dream at our home in Edgbaston. A true professional, Mike was one hundred per cent committed to making ITV's "A Nice Natter with Anne and Nick", so imagine my excitement when, over champagne and lashings of smoked salmon, he told me he'd had a great idea for improving it. "From now on, we're going to re-name it, "A Nice Natter with Carol and Nick," he said. "It's got a friendlier sort of ring to it."

I thought nothing of it at the time. But six months later I discovered that, for the past year, I'd been presenting the programme from our living room every morning – but none of the cameras had been switched on. It meant only one thing: from now on, I would be fighting back from despair.

As told to

CRAIG BROWN


I HAD A DREAM LAST NIGHT THAT I WAS A VERY FRAIL MAN IN HIS LATE NINETIES...
I WAS BEING PUSHED IN A WHEELCHAIR WITH A BLANKET OVER ME. IT WAS WEIRD - LIKE A PREMONITION...
I SEE
DID YOU FIND THIS PREMONITION UPSETTING? DEPRESSING?
NO. NOT AT ALL, NO.
THE BLANKET WAS OVER MY HEAD. I'M GONNA BE FAMOUS ENOUGH NOT TO WANT TO BE PHOTOGRAPHED FOR DONKEYS' YEARS YET!

Literary Review

Uncle Sham

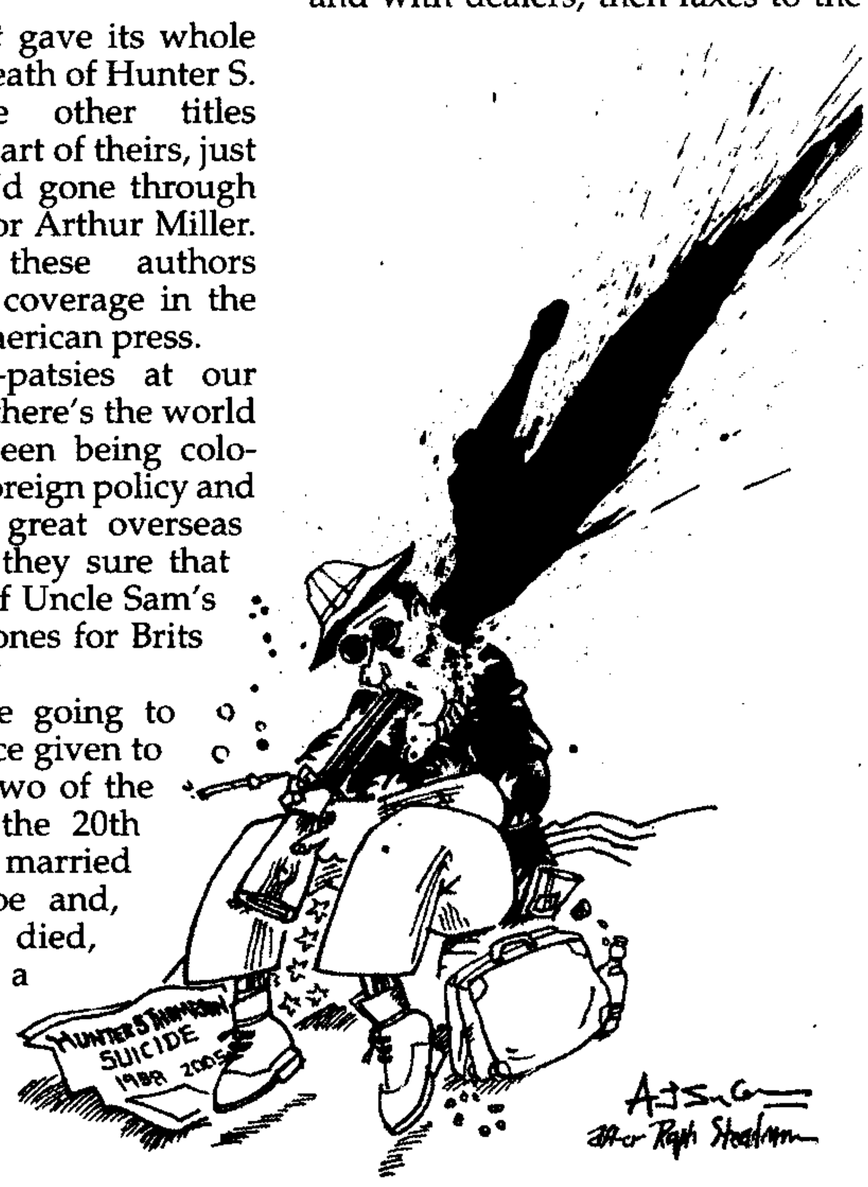
Dr Hunter S. Thompson (1937-2005)

FUNNY, isn't it, how the very same newspapers that furiously attack Tony Blair for becoming a lapdog of America are happy to be poodles of the US when it comes to culture.

The *Independent* gave its whole front page to the death of Hunter S. Thompson, while other titles allowed at least a part of theirs, just 10 days after they'd gone through the same routine for Arthur Miller. Bizarrely, both these authors received far more coverage in the British than the American press.

Oh, the Yank-patsies at our dailies would say, there's the world of difference between being colonised by a dodgy foreign policy and paying tribute to great overseas literature. But are they sure that even these pages of Uncle Sam's Songbook are the ones for Brits to be singing from?

Few people are going to argue with the space given to Arthur: he wrote two of the greatest plays of the 20th century, had been married to Marilyn Monroe and, at the time he died, was going with a chick 60 years his junior. Respect. But Hunter S. Thompson? I mean what exactly is the fuss about?



Journos love Thompson because he represents the ultimate myth of the hack as the boozed-up, wired outsider: the reporter-as-outlaw who, breaking all the rules, creates a new form of journalism that shakes the establishment. Then, gilding the myth, he makes a death which encourages the legend that he committed suicide because he couldn't stand Bush's America.

Strange, though, isn't it, that even papers such as the *Daily Mail*, which hound pop stars or minor royals who have been caught with a smidgen of pot, gave whole admiring pages to a man who, for most of his life, caused police sniffer-dogs to have all leave cancelled if he ever went near an airport. The truth is that Hunter S. Thompson was the Pete Doherty of American literature but, just as the cases of journos exposed as paedophiles by Operation Ore went strangely unreported, so Class A drugs are fine so long as you're a famous reporter.

What the payroll hacks so admire is that Thompson invented "Gonzo Journalism": a theory of reporting in which the correspondent runs up huge expenses in bars and with dealers, then faxes to the magazine his rough notes rather than a drafted article. The copy should always arrive too late for editing. In fact, though Thompson certainly did risk frying his brain and liver with numerous dubious substances, he routinely broke all his own rules. Keen to write books rather than articles, he worked through draft after draft to create the effect of maverick paraphrasing that the finished pieces have.

Non-Thompson readers tempted to the bookshelf by all the fuss should dip into *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, if they can tolerate sentimentality about narcotics; and *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72*, if they can take detailed analysis of why the American left failed to mount a coherent opposition during the Vietnam war.

But both of those books will date like yoghurt in a switched-off fridge and everything Thompson published was either juvenilia that should have been left in a drawer or tired-out writing faxed from his hideout to pay booze, pills or legal bills. The line in much of the posthumous coverage in Britain was that Thompson was somehow more admirable than Tom Wolfe (who, by implication, has sold out to populism and become right-wing); but the truth of the Wolfe-Thompson comparison is that going to the gym and listening to Manhattan's best cardiologists is better for a writer's talent than coke and bourbon.

In fact, a survey of Thompson's published work suggests two morals.

1) His writing was better in the early years when he had drive and ideas and was prepared to rewrite it over and over again until he got it right.

2) He ceased to be worth reading when the effects of heavy drinking and smoking took hold of his prose and he stopped going out to report, relying instead on news bulletins worked up into columns containing dull, repetitive tics.

If those are the rules of Gonzo, then the *Daily Telegraph* is gonzo. Hell, the *Eastern Daily Press* is gonzo. What you witnessed in the media obituaries was middle-aged journalists weeping for their own lost fire and wildness, clinging to the figures of the 60s. And these – note well again – are the same guys who keep accusing politicians of being in hock to American values.

Books & Bookmen

■ WHEN Caroline Michel was brought into HarpicCollins a couple of years ago to set up the glamorous new HarperPress division, chief executive Victoria Barnsley described her as "the final piece in the jigsaw".

Now, though, Barnsley has put sales and marketing director John Bond in over Michel's head, a tacit admission that the puzzle wasn't fitting together. The whole company is reported to be more than 30 percent behind budget projections; and the disappointing performance of the HarperPress and HarperPerennial outfit is understood to be a major cause of this. However, while Michel has had her wings clipped, it is the other longer-established imprints at Harpic that are really suffering. Flamingo has already gone, despite doing far better than HarperPress ever has, and now, as part of its Publishing+ initiative (curious name for a retrenchment exercise), Fourth Estate US is to fold, following Christopher Potter's decision to take a break from publishing.

Has it occurred to Barnsley she might be letting the wrong people leave? Many longer-serving editors wonder who will be next.

■ WHAT motivated the *Independent*'s recent grovelling profile of seedy Palestinian parfumier Naim Attallah?

Listing Naim's various attributes, John Walsh observed that Attallah-Disgusting "wears eccentricity like bankers wear braces", but he didn't say that, until a few years ago, he also wore the least convincing wig in Britain.

Walsh also mentions that he ran Aspreys, but tactfully omits to mention what an utter balls he made of it. Then there's the matter of *Ghosting* by Attallah's former amanuensis, Jennie Erdal. According to the *Independent*, Attallah-Disgusting has responded to Erdal's suggestions that she wrote all of his books by banging out the first two volumes of his autobiography, apparently unaided.

This glowing tribute probably has everything to do with the fact that Attallah threatened the *Independent* with all manner of legal nastiness, following its coverage of the publication of Erdal's book (*Eye* 1121). The powers that be decided not to fight Attallah, much to the chagrin of literary editor Boyd Tonkin, and, voilà, a feature appears on what a diamond geezer Attallah-Disgusting really is.

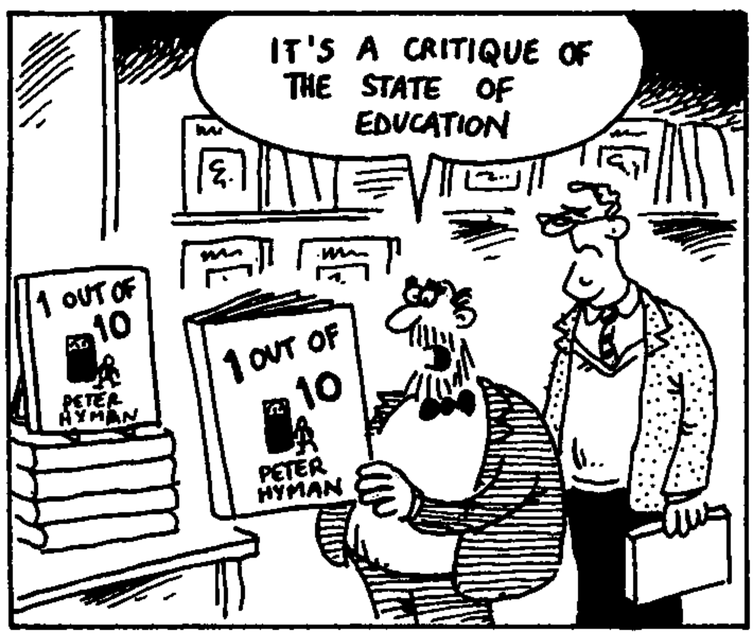
■ NOT ALL publicity is good publicity, as Dan Franklin of Jonathan Cape has discovered, after the *Evening Standard* decided to publish its interview with Ian McEwan a week or so earlier than agreed.

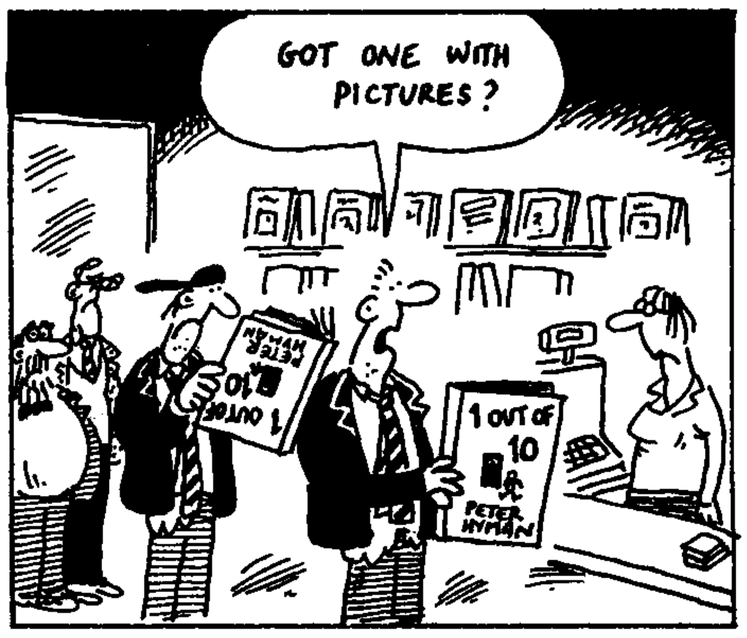
McEwan's new novel *Saturday* was scheduled for release on 31 January, the centrepiece of the Booksellers' Association's new initiative to set rigid launch dates and combat early selling – long a thorn in publishers' sides. Newspapers all agreed to hold off on their avalanche of McEwania, but *Standard* editor Veronica Wadley decided to steal a march and publish on 17 January, leaving the way clear for everyone else to claim the agreement was void.

Now Franklin is keen to get the *Standard* to stump up the £10,000 it cost to rush the book to the shops a week early to satisfy the sudden demand. Wadley is thought to be hoping Franklin will cavil at incurring considerable legal expense and give up, but the BA, which has had an unsightly hole blown in its perfectly reasonable scheme, will be encouraging him not to take things lying down.

■ ORGANISERS of World Book Day events in the UK have had to issue a warning over the correct way to use the free £1 book tokens sent to schools.

You might think it obvious that the tokens are to be given to





FIRST DRAFTS

Daphne DuMaurier

children to encourage them to go to bookshops and find the special £1 books produced for the event. But as the Booksellers' Association says: "Every year we get reports of staff trying to settle school accounts with the WBD book tokens."

■ PRESSED on Radio 4's *Today* programme for an example of a book which would have been affected by his proposed amendments to the proceeds of crime act, Michael Howard was only able to come up with *The Gates of Janus*, the unreadable ramblings of moors murderer Ian Brady which were released to a storm of protest in 2001, and from which Howard insisted Brady "gained an estimated twelve to fifteen thousand pounds".

In fact Brady received nothing of the sort. The only cash which definitely changed hands was an advance of around £3,500 which was paid to his elderly mother. The book was published by US outfit Feral House – which would have made it very difficult for the attorney general to get his hands on any profits – and only received a limited distribution in the UK of around 3,500 copies.

This would have made Brady's family a maximum of around £6,000 in royalties in the unlikely event that they all sold at full price – rather less than the £200,000 to £300,000 Pan Macmillan estimates Howard's pal Jeffrey Archer made from the first volume of his prison diaries, published while he was still in Belmarsh.

Moreover, since Brady's book, unlike Archer's, makes no mention of his own crimes but instead gives his opinions on rival serial killers, it is unlikely the legislation Howard is proposing would even apply to it.

■ ONE person nervously watching the Tory party's efforts to amend the proceeds of crime act to stop convicted criminals profiting from books about their crimes will be John Blake, the publisher who has spent much of the last decade throwing money at such charming characters as Charles Bronson, "Chopper" Read, Vic Dark and Lenny "The Guv'nor" Maclean.

Blake already faces worrying developments in the courts in Ulster, where last month a judge ruled that the widow of Thomas McErlean, one of three mourners murdered by loyalist Michael Stone in a gun and grenade attack on an IRA funeral in 1988, could apply for a judicial review to force the government to recoup the £30,000 compensation she was paid from Stone, whose memoirs *None Shall Divide Us* were published by Blake two years ago.

Stone, who was released under the Good Friday agreement and now markets himself as a self-educated philosopher and artist, said last month he would "rather burn my paintings than sell them to pay off people who are trying to ruin me... I've moved on and so should she. I don't rob banks or shoot people in the legs. I work seven hours a day in my studio."

'Bookworm'

LIBRARY NEWS

■ AFTER years of delays which consigned most of Brighton's main library books to dismal temporary premises in a downtown office block, a costly PFI deal with Norwich Union has at last brought a new library – whose opening the council celebrated by sending hundreds of perfectly good books to the dump.

Some were saved by an outraged builder who, on finding a skip full of library books, made several journeys to a charity shop in his van.

Indeed, Skidrow-on-Sea council seems to have an ambivalent attitude to books in general. The new library has 66,000 "items" on its shelves, including thousands of CDs and DVDs – much liked because the council can charge for them. Some 100,000 volumes are in store. There isn't room for them to be on display because of the number of sofas. Although there have been some new purchases, disposals mean that the overall stock is much what it was before the library was booted out of the handsome Dome building to make way for a bar.

That costs will be a continuing problem is suggested by a long-running sub-plot: the narrowly-averted fate of grade-II listed Hove library which, until residents erupted in force, the council had hoped to sell off for still-unspecified purposes, thus offsetting some of the costs of the PFI library. Even now, it is trying to close Hove's highly-regarded reference library and mix such books on the shelves with those for borrowing.

■ A LETTER from the Richard Rogers Partnership brings to our attention an unfortunate error in Library News, Eye 1126. We reported that the estimated cost of the new out-of-centre Eastside library had reached £300m, which should have read £200m.

Lord Rogers' team insists the cost is in fact £130m, but the figures Birmingham council is working from (a consultant's report from late last year) say it will be more than £200m – which is more than the council wants to pay.

The latest scheme to be mooted is a new library on the site of, er, the old library. The 1960s building is structurally past it and will probably be demolished as part of a regeneration of the Paradise Circus area.

Warballs 'N' NEOPHILIACS

● "'Pink is the new black,' says eBay's style director, Constance White. 'I think it's partly the war. Pink is a very sweet, childish, optimistic colour. Perhaps subconsciously, that's part of its staying power this year." — ***Sunday Telegraph.***

Pseuds Corner

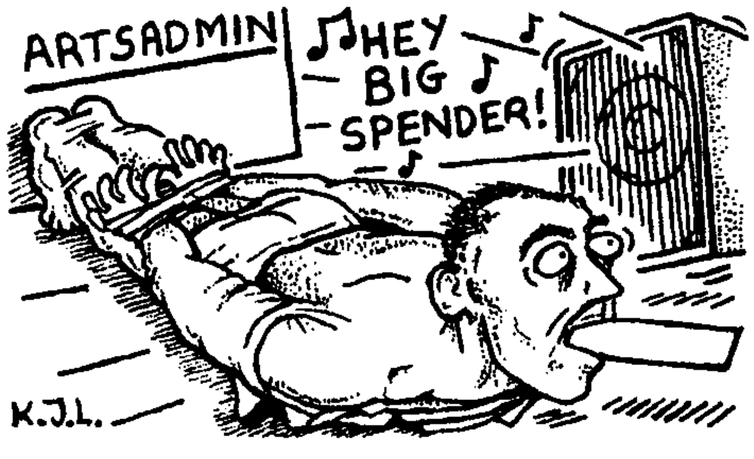
[Pete] Doherty provides the schadenfreude as his ululations of Kate-love are accompanied by snapshots of his no-hoper existence: he perfectly performs his function as the manifestation of a cultural icon's wilder side. For Moss's dominant traits are beauty and danger, an oxymoronic shackling that's usually manufactured or ends in crash and burn...

She's a walking Rorschach test. She incorporates world-beating beauty and the bandy-legged, snaggle-toothed charm of an underfed Croydon schoolgirl. Unlike your average supermodel, she shouldn't even be beautiful. She's short. She's nicotine-stained. She appears to have medium-sized eyes that float on her head. Resembling the love-child of a Burmese princess and a hammerhead shark, she is somehow, nevertheless, astonishingly beautiful.

Moss trails the whiff of the Croydon comp, of Primrose Hill hedonism, of NHS teeth and pure, dirty London. Her former boyfriend reportedly won her heart by telling her she smelt of wee. She's somehow simply, ineffably cool. She's more often snapped fag in hand, screwing up pisshole eyes to take a drag on a London street, than posing on a red carpet. She might have to die now to keep up her appeal. She'll probably disappear to the Hebrides and breed instead... *[continues for some while]*

JOANNA BRISCOE – 'Why Women Love Kate Moss', *Guardian*

Paul Hurley is 25 and single. Since 2003 he has been combining elements of queer theory, poststructuralist philosophy and invertebrate zoology in an evolving series of works (performances, durational actions, videos and installations) shown in the UK and abroad. Exploring the boundaries at which 'the human' and 'the animal' converge, these becomings-invertebrates have included becoming-snail, -slug, -spider, -housefly, -earthworm, -cockroach and -marine sponge. It is from this series that Paul Hurley will be making a special presentation at Artsadmin, integrating theoretical text, physical action and music of Shirley Bassey.



Forthcoming Artsadmin performance

Pseuds Corporate

Q37. Why is Compaq changing the colors of its ProLiant servers and racks?

A37. Rather than changing colors, we are leveraging a portion of our color palette -which includes Graphite, Carbon and Silver – across our Compaq ProLiant, AlphaServer, Himalaya and StorageWorks product lines. This new consistency is the culmination of our strategy to integrate the three heritage businesses of Compaq, Tandem and Digital Equipment Corporation in the enterprise customer space.

Compaq annnoucement

CONTRIBUTORS: Rick Bryant, Roland Glasser, Dave Lawson.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

PFI SPECIAL

MANY HAPPY RETURNS

THE recent national audit office (NAO) finding that the Darent Valley hospital PFI will produce annual returns for investors of around 56 percent (against the mere 21 percent envisaged when the contract was signed) was greeted with equanimity by Tory chair of the public accounts committee, Edward Leigh.

His comfortable conclusion was that: "This has been a reasonable deal for the public sector but a fantastic deal for the private companies... the private sector is justified in being rewarded for having taken a risk by entering what was the first PFI hospital contract."

Neither Mr Leigh nor anybody else mentioned the original 1999 NAO report on the deal, which found that the projected savings from the PFI had been seriously overstated. Far from being the £17m claimed, the failure to calculate costs properly meant that "there is uncertainty as to the exact level of savings, if any, that will be achieved". Whether any marginal benefit remains following the NAO's new findings that the trust has not properly penalised the PFI consortium for failings in the contract is not addressed in the latest report. Nor is the effect on the delicate financial balance of the £46m that the NHS will now have to cough up if the contract ever collapses (somewhat conflicting with the purpose of PFI to pass such risks to the private sector).

The potential liability for the NHS was negotiated as part of a "refinancing" deal in 2003 under which the NHS was given £12m out of a £33m gain. Along with other profits, this windfall has enabled the members of the PFI consortium – Innisfree, Tarmac (now Carillion), Barclays and United Medical Enterprises – to take £37m out of the deal on a £13m investment only three years after the new hospital opened.

So how could a deal of little or no benefit to taxpayers generate such riches for the PFI industry?

The first NAO report criticised the bidding process for lacking competition and being pushed through too quickly. It did not consider, however, the role played in the negotiation by the man running the department of health's private finance unit at the time, Robert Osborne, who had been recruited from Tarmac, the very company that was to build the hospital and as a member of the PFI consortium would part-own it. Six months after the deal went through Osborne slipped quietly back into Tarmac to run its (by then vastly enriched) PFI division. Rather than questioning this, however, the NAO was satisfied that the contract was approved by KPMG, despite the accountancy firm's conflict of interest in both advising the hospital trust and auditing the lucky bidder.

The deal reached "financial close", ie had a price put on it, on 28 July 1997. In the preceding three months of brand "new" Labour government, paymaster-general Geoffrey Robinson had set about very publicly "kicking over" the obstacles to PFI and extolling its virtues. One explanation for the huge return now being reaped by the PFI companies is not that they were taking large risks (would a treasury so vigorously pushing PFI have let a flagship PFI hospital fail?), but that all involved had overwhelming political or financial interests in a deal at any cost. But that's not in the script that says the millions now going to the PFI pioneers are just rewards for the "risks" they took in the early days.

Flagging ship

THE national audit office (NAO) is also looking into the multi-million-pound repayments to private sector consortium Octagon Healthcare to see if Norfolk was stitched up when buying its new hospital on the never-never.

More than £37m a year is paid back by East Anglians for their new £229m PFI hospital (*Eyes passim*). With 30 years of payments to make, the public sector will pay for the building five times over. The scheme was an early experiment in the use of private finance, starting in 1998; and the greater uncertainties then pushed up the price tag.

Local politicians hope the NAO report, due for completion by Easter, will encourage central government to contribute to the repayments, given that it used the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital (NNUH) as its PFI guinea pig.

If not, the impact of the "flagship" hospital on local health services will be devastating. The county's health services as a whole face a deficit of £30m; and last summer the hospital had to cut spending by £15m.

Jarvis jinx

HOW does a public body get out of using the private finance initiative for its new buildings?

The lesson from Norfolk council's school building programme is to use vast amounts of public money setting up a large PFI scheme with an unreliable private sector "partner" who won't be able to deliver, then to go cap in hand to the government when the firm lets you down.

After years trying to get its schools PFI project off the ground with Jarvis, the council finally lost patience in November last year when no building firm would agree to work with the pisspoor PFI company because of its lamentable record in paying contractors. Even as the deal fell through, however, Tory council leaders were insisting that PFI was the "only and best option".

Three months later it emerges that PFI is not quite the only option for building schools, especially when there's a risk of a public backlash soon before an election. After widespread calls for the government to step in to resurrect the PFI project (which could never be done without admitting that the taxpayer carried the risks in PFI deals), the department for education and skills (DfES) has agreed to support the schools building project through more traditional methods. It has set aside £56m to be handed over to the council as it repays the borrowings taken on to build and refurbish the schools. And, unlike under PFI, the council will own and control its own school buildings.

Unsurprisingly Jarvis hasn't entered into the spirit of this belated happy ending. Having put local council taxpayers to considerable cost through the aborted PFI deal, the firm has been asked by local MP Norman Lamb to waive its design fees of £1.7m, which remain due despite the contract's collapse. So far the bill remains outstanding.

THE DEATH OF CHRISTIAN BLEWITT

Adding salt to the wound

AS MORE doubt is cast on the conviction of Ian and Angela Gay for poisoning their three-year-old foster son Christian Blewitt with salt (see last *Eye*), questions are being asked about why the prosecution and the judge, Mr Justice Pitchers, allowed the case to continue when it became clear that medical opinion over the cause of the boy's death was so completely divided.

When Angela Cannings' conviction for killing her children was quashed by the appeal court last year, the appeal judges were adamant that when medical opinion over the possibility of natural causes was split – and when there was no other evidence pointing to foul play – murder or manslaughter charges should not be brought, let alone allowed to continue. The appeal court judges said that cases of sudden infant death were at the frontier of medical and scientific knowledge, which is still evolving; and that further research was needed. They even accepted that in the meantime their decision may mean that in a very small number of cases, parents who had killed a child without leaving a trace might escape justice. But they said: "That is an undesirable result, which however, avoids a worse one... Unless we are sure of guilt the dreadful possibility always remains that a mother, already brutally scarred by the unexplained death or deaths of her babies, may find herself in prison for life for killing them when she should not be there at all. In our community, and in any civilised community, that is abhorrent."

One of the judges who signed up to this judgment was none other than Mr Justice Pitchers, who condemned the "cruel" Gays. Yet as the last *Eye* pointed out, as the trial progressed medical opinion was deeply divided about nearly all aspects of Christian's health and death. Though high and potentially fatal levels of sodium chloride had been found in his blood, expert opinion differed on whether this was the result of deliberate salt poisoning or because his body was not excreting it properly. The prosecution case against the Gays was also "adapted" once it became clear that bruising to Christian's brain had occurred while he was in hospital and not while he was in their care. Other troubling aspects of Christian's health, including his "unique" history of heart damage and hydrocephalus, diagnosed on one of his many admissions to hospital, long before he went into the Gays' care, were not properly explored by the court at all.

Nor was there any evidence to suggest when, why or how the Gay couple had decided to use salt as a punishment, nor any evidence about how they could have administered it. Experts could not agree either on how much he would have needed to consume.

The six-week trial was dominated by 12 experts. One, home office pathologist Dr Peter Acland, has already said publicly he believes the couple may be the victims of a miscarriage of justice. "Certainly on the medical evidence, there is 'significant doubt' that the couple had killed the child with salt," he said. It has also emerged that there were concerns recorded in Christian's social worker notes, made long before he went into the Gays' care, that he suffered from excessive thirst – a possible indicator that his body was not properly controlling sodium chloride levels. Furthermore, the only "expert" paper published on the subject of deliberate salt poisoning comes from the now discredited child abuse expert, paediatrician Sir Roy Meadow, who was behind not only the Cannings case but also those of Sally Clarke and Trupti Patel, both wrongly accused of killing their children.

The crown prosecution service (CPS) has said that it considered the Cannings appeal when bringing the case against the Gays and claimed it was significantly different. At three, Christian's could not be a case of sudden infant death; and, moreover, salt poisoning had been identified as a cause of death.

Solicitor John Batt, who represented Sally Clarke and who is now helping prepare the Gays' appeal, said: "It is ludicrous to suggest that once a child hits 12 months, it cannot be a victim of sudden unexplained death – Sudden Adult Death syndrome is rare but well recognised in medicine."

OLDIES

DON'T BUPA CARE HOMES?

FORMER care staff who made serious allegations of neglect, potentially fatal doping and mistreatment of old people at Isard House, a Bupa-run care home near Bromley in Kent, have at last learned what action police took in response to a dossier of evidence they submitted three years ago. It was all but ignored.

No statement was taken from any witness. No member of staff at the home was interviewed. And Bupa itself was never even approached over the allegations. In fact police notes suggest that just a few hours after three bundles of documents – mainly complex medical records – were submitted, officers had already decided that "no crime had been confirmed".

This is alarming since, on face value, the medical sheets seemed to show that a number of elderly residents were given potentially fatal doses of powerful drugs. One resident, E.P., had on four occasions been give a dose of tranquilliser that was *nine* times the daily prescribed 30mls dose and *six* times higher than what is considered safe for an elderly person.

Eye readers may also recall the case of Audrey Ford, another Isard House resident who was taken to hospital suffering from the side-effects of a powerful anti-pyschotic which should only have been given to those suffering severe mental illness, like schizophrenia. She never recovered and the coroner recorded an open verdict.

The care staff have been trying for some time now to discover what progress police had made in their investigations; and under the freedom of information act they found out last month. A police summary said it had been decided to make only limited inquiries into the allegations "to prevent unnecessary use of police time for an inquiry that was unlikely to be brought before a court".

Officers obtained a brief report from the coroner's office listing "those deaths of occupants from Isard House with cause". However, it said none was the subject of an inquest and the examining doctor had issued death certificates in all cases. "Therefore it must be assumed that no suspicious circumstances were identified." These were exactly the sort of assumptions the Shipman inquiry condemned so vigorously.

The police report said: "As indicated only limited inquiries have been made, no persons accused have ever been interviewed, nor have Bupa formally been approached by police to assist in the inquiry. Subject to crown prosecution service advice, no further action will be taken."

Eileen Chubb, one of the careworkers who now runs a charity, Compassion in Care, said: "The need for a public inquiry is now overwhelming. How can the crown prosecution service decide whether there is a case, if the police don't bother to investigate and gather evidence in the first place?"

Chai victory

TONY BLAIR's former health guru, Dr Chai Patel, has managed to halt the general medical council (GMC) proceedings brought against him over allegations of neglect in one of his former care homes.

Dr Patel is accused of failing to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of elderly residents at Lynde House, Twickenham, south-west London, when he was chief executive of the home's owner at the time, Westminster Healthcare.

To the regret of the families who were hoping for a public hearing into their complaints about the treatment of their relatives at Lynde House, Dr Patel has won a judicial review of the charges of serious professional misconduct laid against him by the GMC.

The hearing before the "fitness to practise" panel had been due to last six weeks. But the first three were taken up with legal argument put forward by Dr Patel, which has already resulted in critical independent inspection reports – on which the families were relying – being ruled out on the grounds that they are "hearsay".

Dr Patel has always said he is anxious to give evidence to show the allegations were flawed. But he is now unlikely to give evidence for several months – if at all.

ALLIANCE MEDICAL

It's a scan-dal

ALLIANCE Medical, the private company now roundly criticised over the medical scans it has been doing for the NHS since last June, was effectively allowed to design its own privatisation contract, *Private Eye* has discovered.

Documents obtained under the freedom of information act show that the firm approached the department of health in December 2002 with proposals which closely predicted the government tender it subsequently won. Alliance Medical, it seems, was able to write its own script.

In 2002 the firm's director Andy Dun contacted Bob Ricketts, the department of health's "head of capacity", with a paper called *Primary Care Facing Diagnostic Centres*. It set out a "vision of Alliance Medical" running a network of "locally available centre[s] where... GPs and others can refer patients that require diagnostic tests that would otherwise be referred to a specialist or to a hospital for investigation."

It is not clear why Rickets did not immediately take up the Alliance offer. However, in February 2004 civil servants met Alliance as "part of a series of informal meetings with potential providers of MRI scanning services that were intended to test the market to assess the likely value for money and the potential capacity for providing such services in the independence sector". Alliance Medical's Andy Dun and Andy Shaw met two civil servants, Alan Southall and Dorte Jepsen, representing the NHS. The NHS met other providers too – InHealth, Lodestone, HCA and Mercury Health – but they were apparently less impressive.

Alliance resubmitted its 2002 paper with a new "scoping paper" (which has not been released to the *Eye* because of commercial confidentiality). In March 2004, Alan Milburn, who had resigned as health secretary in June 2003 to spend more time with his family, became an adviser to Bridgepoint Capital, the finance firm that owns Alliance. In April the department of health announced the tender for the scanner contract which, in June, Alliance won. The contract looked remarkably like its 2002 proposal.

TAX AVOIDANCE

Very oily

THOUSANDS of British oil rig workers have been transferred out of UK employment by oil company contractors dodging national insurance contributions.

A report by the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC) trade union reveals that 17 major employers have transferred workers to tax haven shell companies in recent years to avoid paying NI employer contributions and save 12 percent off the payroll.

Staff who joined UK-based companies now find themselves employed by "brass plate" offices in Singapore, Barbados, Cyprus, the US or Caymans. While tax avoidance isn't illegal, OILC suggests that transferring workers to foreign employment but not their tax obligations could constitute unfair dismissal.

Besides the lost tax, the workers are no longer covered by UK legal ewmployment or health and safety protection. At a conference on corporate accountability last October, procurator fiscal John Watt said it was difficult to prosecute when the "duty holder" under health and safety rules was not based in the UK.

The offshore industry is one of the most dangerous, with three fatal accidents and 48 major injuries last year among 20,000 workers. While ducking paying into the NI pot (much of which goes to the NHS), the offshore industry continues to pile pressure on health services in the Aberdeen area, where most injured workers are taken. Surgery and acute-care burns don't come cheap – unless you're an offshore contractor.

PS: BP emerges as a good guy, refusing to accept platform workers whose NI contributions are not being made.

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **RESTRAINT DEATHS:** Health ministers have always deflected criticism over their failure to act on recommendations of the inquiry by Sir John Blofeld into the death of David "Rocky" Bennett by saying that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (Nice) would issue new guidelines on the restraint of mentally ill patients.

However, when Nice reported last week, it appears to have ignored the Blofeld inquiry too. For while it said that physical restraint should be a last resort, it failed to highlight how holding patients face down can and does result in fatality. It also ignored advice from both the inquiry and the parliamentary joint committee on human rights that a patient should be held down for a maximum of three minutes.

Rocky Bennett, 38, a Jamaican-born drummer, died at the Norvic Clinic in Norwich after being held face down for between 20 and 30 minutes by at least four mental health nurses.

Helen Shaw, co-director of the charity Inquest which campaigns for those who die while in the care of the state, took little comfort from the proposal that those using restraint should be trained in resuscitation and life support techniques. "This is a profoundly inadequate response to the appalling death of Rocky Bennett. It is particularly shocking that there is no reference that alerts practitioners to the deaths that have occurred following physical restraint and the special dangers posed by prone restraint."

Dr Joanna Bennett, Rocky Bennett's sister, maintained: "Mental health services continue to be in denial about critical incidents and deaths associated with control and restraint."

Only three months after the Blofeld inquiry reported, 24-year-old Azrar Ayub, a patient at the secure Edenfield unit at Prestwich hospital, near Manchester, died after being sedated and restrained by staff.

■ **CO-OP DEMOLITION:** The Co-op has failed to convince the high court to intervene in its unpopular plan to knock down three 200-year-old cottages in Didsbury village, Manchester, and put up a three-storey block of shops (see last *Eye*).

The Co-op feared that Manchester city council would chuck out its plan after it was revealed that five development-friendly councillors had shares or were sponsored by the Co-op and had been advised by council legal officers not to play a part in the decision.

So fearful was United Co-operatives that it wanted this legal advice ruled unlawful. But last week Mr Justice Elias threw out its application for judicial review, saying the courts were reluctant to subject "mere advice" to scrutiny.

It is now down to the councillors themselves to decide if their interests in the Co-op conflict with their interests and code of conduct as planners when the vote is taken on whether to pull down the cottages.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

ONE-TIME Labour donor Robert Bourne (the former Tory-supporting property developer is believed to be less than happy with his £100,000 investment for the 2001 election since he failed to buy the Greenwich dome and may not write a cheque this time) has stirred up a storm with his plans to redevelop a major site in London's Chinatown. But he has already made a big profit even before the development begins.

Bourne paid £24m in April 2003 for the Newport Sandringham site of his proposed ChinaTown Village retail project. Now Bourne estimates the prime property location is worth at least £30m. This valuation is contained in the accounts to December 2003 for Rosewheel which were agreed last December, so that valuation is likely to be conservative.

It is therefore no surprise the Bourne company is expected to press on with its plans despite vigorous protests from small retailers who have or will be forced to leave, as well as from the local community whose members fear that ChinaTown Village will be just another retail shopping centre with the usual high-rent, high street retailers which will severely damage this unique neighbourhood.

Backed by a near £40m loan from Bank of Scotland, Bourne is likely to face vocal opposition once he applies to Westminster council for planning permission. The council insists it has not so far given any permission for the development which may concern BoS.

Questions have already been raised with Westminster about whether Rosewheel has acted without planning permission in making changes at the site. Rosewheel insists no permission is required because the changes are only internal. But that is disputed by opponents of the development which would see the removal from its current site of the landmark Chinatown pagoda.

Bourne is no stranger to planning rumbles with Westminster. There was a history of planning-related disputes from 1997 over a block of flats and shops including the covered Queensway Market in Bayswater where the council took more than 20 enforcement actions after complaints over unauthorised work and changes of use. The Queensway development is part of Bourne's £100m company Happybadge Projects which owns Rosewheel.

He also had disputes with Richmond-upon-Thames council over the planned restoration of the local theatre which Bourne bought in 1986. Council taxpayers were left with a potential £11m bill, under a 1991 agreement guaranteeing the bank loan for the work, when the theatre ran into financial difficulties in 1996 and was unable to meet the loan repayments. The theatre lease was taken over by another group in 2000.

Bourne's wife Sally Greene is a major player in theatreland having taken over the Old Vic and the Criterion as well as Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club. She is a long-time Labour supporter and hosted a birthday party for the then "Dome Minister" Peter Mandelson at the time Bourne was eyeing the Greenwich white elephant. Bourne's last of three £33,000 donations to Labour also came as he was negotiating to take over the site for a hi-tech science park.

Bourne's Legacy group was awarded preferred bidder status by his Labour friends in November 2000; but his £125m bid never happened because of questions about its financial viability and his Irish partners, as well as the supposed tenants. By February 2001 he was out of the dome.

Bourne made his name with Local London property group which he floated and sold for £120m in 1989. Since then his involvement with stock market-listed companies has been less profitable for investors.

Chairman Bourne resigned from the golf course group Clubhaus in 2002. The debt-laden company struggled on looking for a buyer which it finally found at a big discount in 2004. An inquiry was launched into certain aspects of its affairs by the Department of Timidity & Inaction in 2002 while Bourne was chairman but nothing has been heard since.

The Newport Sandringham site has been a long-time headache for Westminster which retains the freehold. As with the dome, Bourne appeared in 2003 as the rescuer from a very messy situation. Westminster had initially sold a 200-year lease on the Newport Sandringham retail site in 1996 to the Hong Kong-owned Goldline Properties. This was controlled by the Tai family through Golden Land Investments, listed until 2000 on AIM, and their major company Gold-Face Holdings, a Bermuda company listed in Hong Kong.

Goldline outbid a syndicate of local Chinese businessmen who offered more than £11m for a 150-year lease on the retail part of the site which has council flats above and a car park beneath the mostly small and Chinese run shops.

This was a controversial decision as shareholder and former director of Gold-Face, Tai Chin-Wah, a member of the Hong Kong legislative council, had been jailed for nine months in 1993 for impersonating a solicitor for eight years. Gold-Face was listed just weeks after Tai was released from prison. It was run by his brother Tai Chi-Wah who was a Goldline director. The family insisted the disgraced brother was no longer involved in Gold-Face. He did, however, become a director of an associated UK company, Goldrim, which went into liquidation.

Goldline was taken private in 2000, by which time none of the promised improvements had begun on the Newport Sandringham site. One reason for that became clear in 2003 when Gold-Face hit financial difficulties in Hong Kong. Some of its developments were seized by its banks, the shares were suspended and Tai Chi-Wah was charged with conspiracy to defraud.

Against this background Gold-Face was only too happy to unload the loss-making Chinatown lease to repay its bankers, especially as it almost doubled its money on the sale.

Westminster was clearly glad to have a more substantial property developer involved as its leaseholder with the capacity to carry out the planned improvements. But it may yet discover that, like Labour with the dome, Robert Bourne may be part of the problem not the solution to its wish to modernise Chinatown.

FOR anxious pensioners and members of the old Turner & Newall pension fund waiting to see whether the fund will be wound-up as the price of the emergence from Chapter 11 bankruptcy of its US parent Federal Mogul, the lack of news is not reassuring.

After weeks of negotiations T&N's US parent Federal Mogul still seems determined to walk away from even a £90m deal to fund part of the huge £875m hole in the pension fund. If it does not return and the T&N fund has to be wound up, which seems increasingly possible, then existing pensions could be frozen and future ones possibly halved or worse for the up to 40,000 members.

Meanwhile it is reassuring to note that Kroll, the UK administrator which is handling the possible sale of the old T&N business, has not done badly since the group collapsed under the weight of its asbestos litigation liabilities in 2001.

Kroll has been paid more than £9.1m for three years work to September 2004, almost £2m in the previous six months alone. No wonder joint administrator Simon Freakley now bosses the whole Kroll empire. The massed lawyers have done even better earning almost £12.5m.

As for the pensioners, well: the UK taxpayer

JUST FANCY THAT!

WHO could doubt the sincerity of the 13 business leaders who wrote to the *Financial Times* when the Olympic assessors were in town, urging support for the London bid?

"Be assured we are on our feet, cheering ourselves hoarse. In a race too close to call the home crowd can make all the difference," they declared from the heart.

The fact that the signatories represented the property firms (including Land Securities), banks (Citigroup), accountants (Deloitte), lawyers (Clifford Chance), PR companies (Publicis) and even a car parking company (NCP) that stand to reap millions from a successful bid must have been entirely coincidental.

And just because one of them, EDF Energy (formerly London Electricity, now owned by Electricite de France) is backing *two* horses by also sponsoring the Paris bid (as is consultancy firm Accenture), nobody should misinterpret the companies' public endorsement of London as a crude attempt to get to the front of the queue if it ever comes to handing out contracts.

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

New Capital for newLabour
PRIME MINISTER, YOU PROMISED TO ABOLISH POVERTY...
...AND YOU, OUR GREAT LEADER, HAVE ACHIEVED THAT OBJECTIVE ...
...REPLACING IT ENTIRELY WITH 'LESS ADVANTAGED' OR 'SOCIALLY EXCLUDED' IN ALL GOVERNMENT PUBLICITY MATERIAL!

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Tech Mania – Five Years On

Value of £100 invested five years ago in...

...**ARM** (hardware) £11

...**Autonomy** (software) £5

...**COLT** (telecoms) £1

...**QXL** (dotcom) 15p

...**Energis** (telecoms) £0

may be left to pick up their bill when the new pension provision fund law comes into force next month. Except that Turner & Newall alone would swamp the resources of the fund. And then there is the impact of the substantial black holes at the failed stores chains Courts and Allders. So there may need to be an even bigger taxpayer bail-out of the ever lengthening numbers of ripped off victims of Whitehall-warranted, supposedly totally safe occupational pension funds.

THE expectation that both Bernie Ebbers of WorldCom and Richard Scrushy of HealthSouth may testify in their fraud trials is likely to see them point the fingers of blame for huge accounting frauds not just at their internal beancounters but also at Wall Street.

The constant refrain from both men, according to their underlings who are testifying against them, is that every quarter the companies had to "make the numbers" – hit the ever-rising earnings per share figures predicted/demanded by analysts pushing the shares.

The role of such short-termism among brokers and bankers in crashes such as Enron, WorldCom and HealthSouth has often been overlooked when it comes to apportioning blame. "Making the numbers" lies behind every case of accountancy fraud which has been exposed since the stock market tide went out in 2000. "Making the numbers" drove the share price upwards which made ever larger takeovers possible which also added up to more millions for executives with their lavish share options. Yet five years on the same motivation is still at work on Wall Street and in the City.

ANOTHER ongoing American fraud trial, the second go round for Tyco chief executive Dennis Kozlowski and finance director Mark Swartz, may bring back some unhappy memories for Tory benefactor Lord Ashcroft who sold his ADT business to Dennis the Menace.

Defence lawyers have made it clear that they believe those directors who testified against Kozlowski and Swartz at the first mis-trial are doing so to protect themselves from Tyco shareholder lawsuits. "The directors are concerned about their pocketbooks," said Kozlowski's lawyer, accusing them of "revisionist history".

This allegation of course cannot be made against Ashcroft who did not testify at the first trial and is not expected to so this time. He also has nothing to fear from any civil actions, some of which have already been thrown out by the US courts. Kozlowski and Swartz maintain all their over-generous bonuses and benefits were known to and approved by the Tyco board. This is disputed – especially by Ashcroft who as a non-executive director denies any knowledge of Kozlowski's excesses. But the oversight role of the Tyco board still looks likely to come in for more criticism at the second trial than the first time.

It also remains to be seen whether instead of the united front presented at the first trial, when Swartz gave evidence, he and Kozlowski will turn on each other this time as well as their former boardroom colleagues.

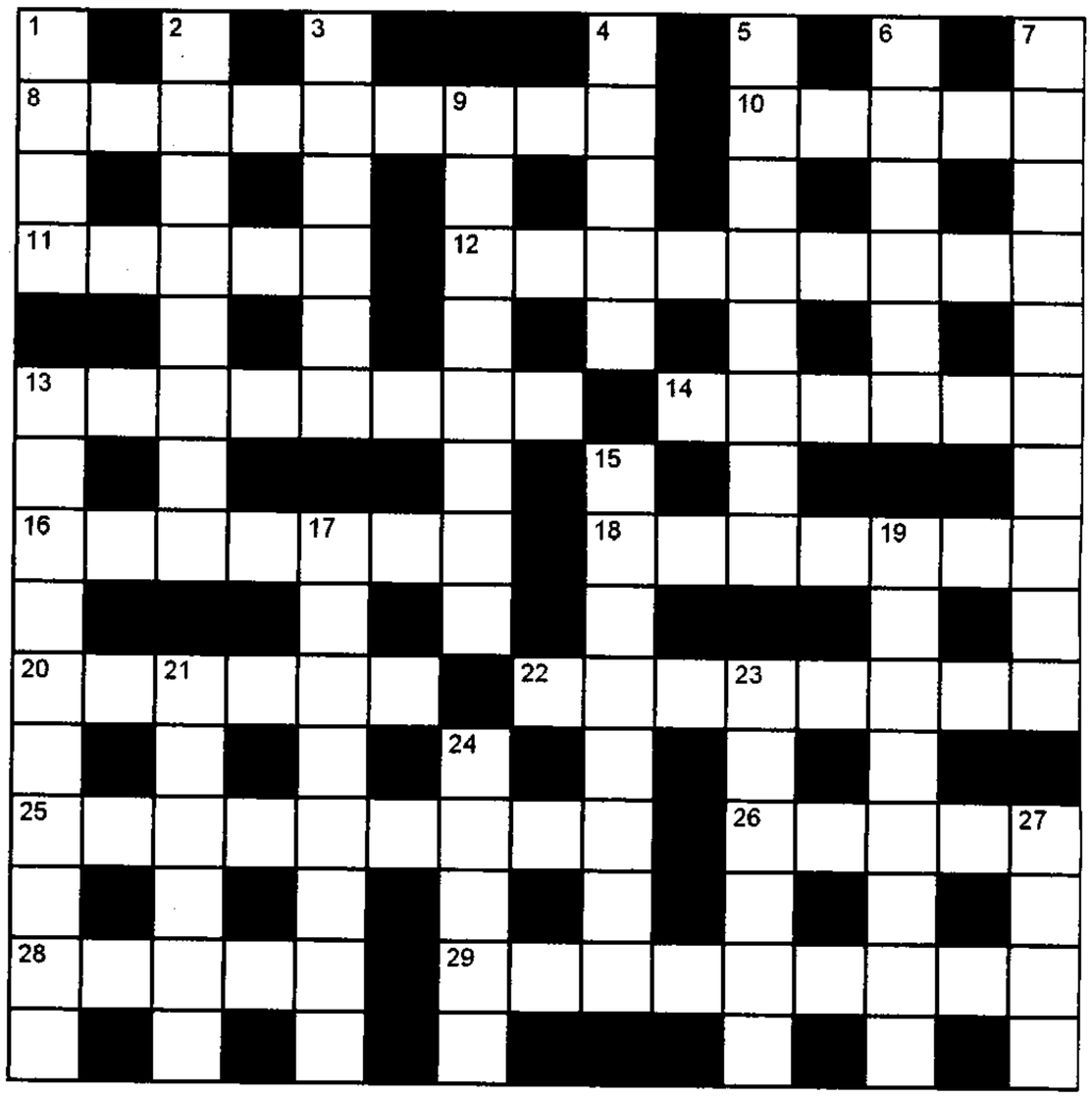
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 282

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 11 March 2005.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

8 Johnny rolled back on middle of prick inserted in facial feature – so intervened (7,2)

10 Block housing initiative grant, initially? – can in America (5)

11 'Clapped' out sod, hack (5)

12 Spot Labour's result against Thatcher (9)

13/17 Handy but tiresome practice of campaigning politicians put to pleasurable use in Clinton's Oval Office? (8,3,5)

14 Chap to take the piss out of (holds record) (6)

16 Beneficiary of member with a ball support (7)

18 Perform a hand job – and do it right (4,3)

20 Resemble Mandelson somewhat – what does that signify? (6)

22 Short woman supporter needs 'reverse bollocks' sex aid (8)

25 Good-for-nothing Wally dealt in heroin (9)

26 Members flipped over a means of corporal punishment (5)

28 Group enough to turn one to drink? (5)

29 Snorter recklessly inhales ecstasy, note, with complete absence of self-reproach (2,7)

DOWN

1 Tart given one by cops (4)

2 Drink: second b— unit beat poet (8)

3 Private Eye's diggers (6)

4 To do cocaine means expulsion (5)

5 Getting thing out (round, white and long) but not one who's quick to go to bed? (8)

6 Sordid business, being associated with MPs these days? (6)

7 Peter, rubber is a nuisance in the garden (10)

9 Kicked out of bed and taken the piss out of (8)

13 PM's hand on Brenda's... Blair gets end away! (10)

15 A dog of a daytime TV host (8)

17 See 13 Across

19 Archer would like to be this devious, not great (2,6)

21 Shameless underwear... stiffy when pet gets out of it (6)

23 Clare's ignored what she had to do, at heart (6)

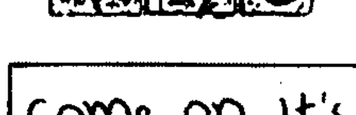
24 Show off's direction on organ fingering (5)

27 Drink up second drink (4)

Crossword 281 winner: JOSEPH DEVEREUX

ACROSS: 1/1D Sympathy shag 5 Duffer 10 Album 11 Tory party 12 Stud farm 13 Rebel 15 Purple 16 Negligee 19 Rhetoric 21 Gambol 24 Cabal 26 Specimen 28 Ursa Minor 29 Incur 30 Toy boy 31 Polygamy.

DOWN: 2 Mobster 3 Armadillo 4 Hitman 6 Upper 7 Firebug 8 Royal jelly 9 Crumpet 14 Sperm count 17 Liability 18 Pissing 20 Embassy 22 Brescia 23 Weirdo 25 Limbo 27 Orgy.



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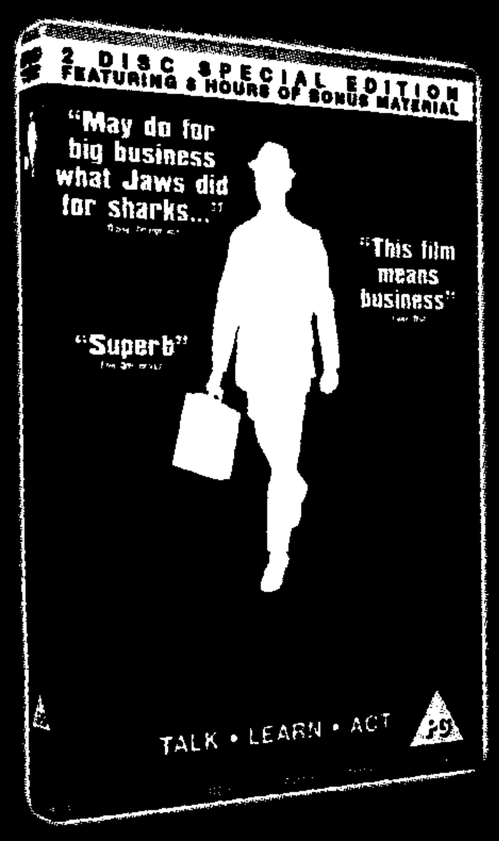
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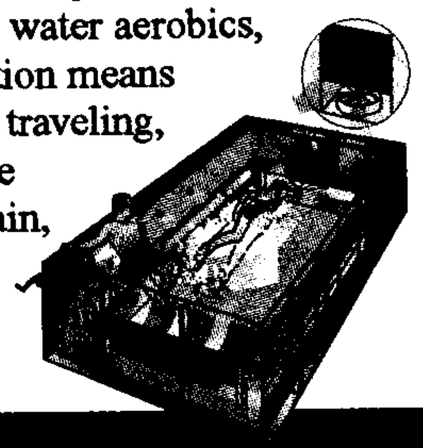

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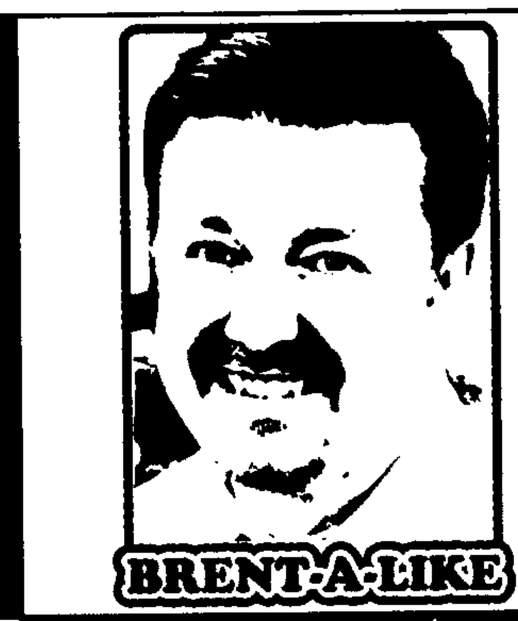

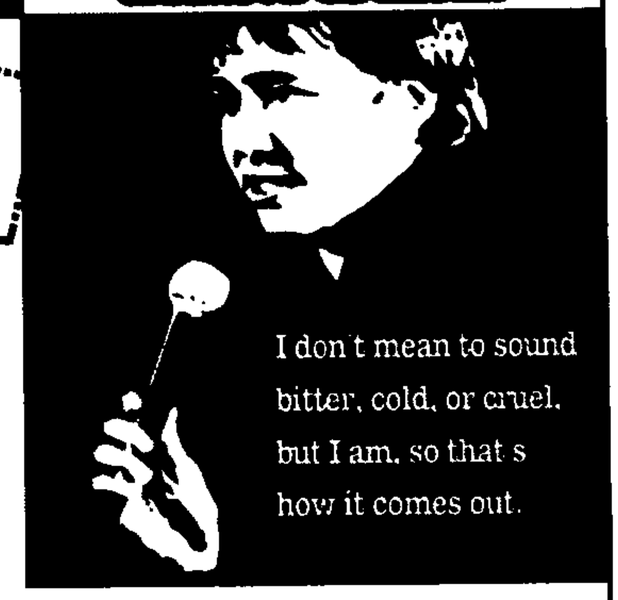

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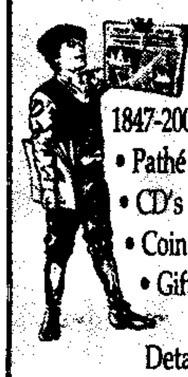

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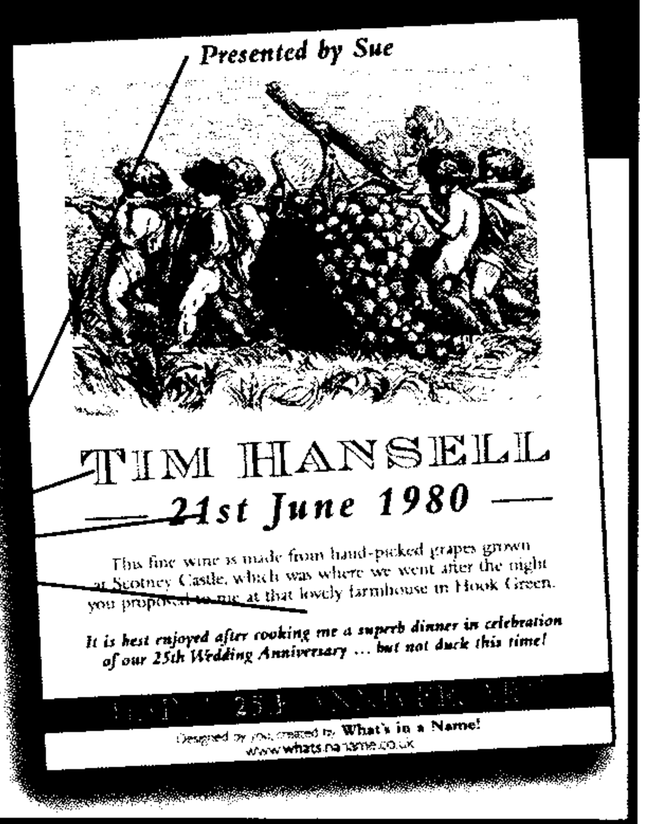
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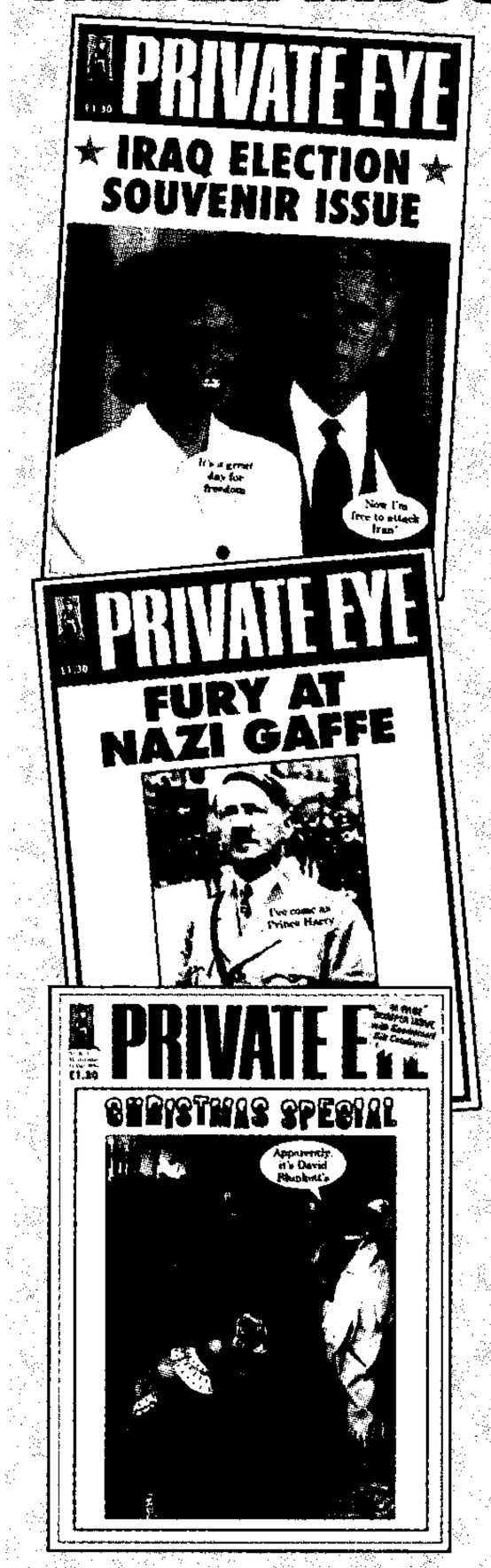

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LONELY, HEARTBROKEN and disillusioned with life, single mum pleading for help with huge debts. S/C: 40-19-15. A/C: 22671220. samsara@amserve.com

TWO OLD SOCIALISTS. Ill health. Still fighting. Please help. Lloyds TSB, S/C: 30-15-95. A/C: 00361222.

TRYING TO BUILD a nest egg, getting nowhere. Young couple in love, please help. Halifax, S/C: 11-10-40. A/C: 00744816.

BALLS BROKEN by ex-wife. Everything lost. Need leg up to become functioning human again. paddlemaster@yahoo.com

CANCER SURVIVOR desperately needs to clear debts. S/C: 30-98-46. A/C: 00846664.

THE CHAP seeks design assistance from adept of QuarkXpress, Photoshop. Initial salary tea, then gin. P.O. Box 39216, London SE3 0XS.

ASPIRING POKER PROFESSIONAL needs sponsor for major TV tournament in return for TV coverage, %, and tuition. Tel: 07901 688 003.

YOU'RE PROBABLY already aware that Justin's engaged and needs help. www.justins-stag-do.co.uk

ADOPTING YOUNG BRITISH CHILD alone. Need £15,000 to stop working until pre-school. Lloyds TSB, S/C: 30-92-89. A/C: 01855132. Thanks.

GM-FREE DAVID needs £5,000 to slay GM Goliath. Genetics Action, S/C: 08-60-01. A/C: 20150752.

BIGGLES NEEDS A HAND! Bertie, Algy and Ginger please help!! 21st Century debt nightmare. Need enough to buy a new Sopwith Camel, What Ho! Halifax, S/C: 11-18-11. A/C: 11185899. Thank you...

BALLET/CONTEMPORARY DANCE STUDENT. Rambert School. Desperately needs £18,000 fees! NatWest, S/C: 60-40-50. A/C: 32043813. helpdancer@yahoo.com

NOT YOUR AVERAGE TEENAGER requires £2,000 to do voluntary work in Romanian orphanages. Thank you. S/C: 80-17-37. A/C: 02053518.

SEPARATED MAN struggling to support family. Please help, as rising debts mean I am desperate. S/C: 10-80-02. A/C: 09388081.

IMPOVERISHED STUDENT needs £10,000 to finish course and pay debts. S/C: 40-28-22. A/C: 81364758.

LOST IN COLONIES, Canadians refuse my education credentials. Need help. HSBC, S/C: 40-21-12. A/C: 01132326.

DESPERATE LONDON STUDENT TEACHER in financial mess beyond own control. Very depressed, needs any help towards £2,000. S/C: 40-40-01. A/C: 61699016.

RADIO CAROLINE NEEDS £20,000 to bring love and good music back to the people. Thanks. freecaroline @hotmail.com

MATURE, MARRIED student trying hard to make things better for his family is getting deeper into debt and sinking fast – please help. S/C: 40-37-36. A/C: 41073427.

LOOKING FOR A FATHER for last chance much wished for child. Reply Box 123897.

STUDENT CLIMBING Mount Kilimanjaro for Save the Children. S/C: 83-47-00. A/C: 00687320.

AWARD-WINNING DIRECTOR needs £2000 to make short film. Too edgy for public funding. Email me for script / storyboard etc. martinow@hotmail.com

TALENTED YOUNG LADY needs £37K for a positive new start. Lloyds TSB, S/C: 773001. A/C; 12009268.

DUE TO ILLNESS / disability and mounting debts, £20K is desperately needed. Can anyone please help. NatWest, S/C: 60-13-28. A/C: 78363543.

SOCIAL PROJECT! Providing music equipment for disadvantaged youth. S/C: 82-67-30. A/C: 70218768.

WOBBLY OLD BIKE cycling the Nile for Charity, October. Need £2,500 donations – have £67 HELP! yharte@yahoo.com or call 01702 474572.

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M62. Tall, intelligent, unattached chap, fifties? Vivacious, affectionate business lady, into walking, concerts, heritage, entertaining, would like to hear from you – summerwine@hotmail.co.uk THIS IS THE CORRECT EMAIL ADDRESS: THE ONE IN ISSUE 1126 WAS NOT.

EYE CONTACT

MEETING ORIENTAL LADIES in England for love, romance or marriage etc. Tel: 0161 9983 669 / 0788 163 0007 or email: tararainbow@yahoo.co.uk

AMUSING, BEAUTIFUL, SEPARATED, intelligent, well-travelled successful yummy mummy, 38, seeks sophisticated man with literary passion. farandaway05@hotmail.co.uk

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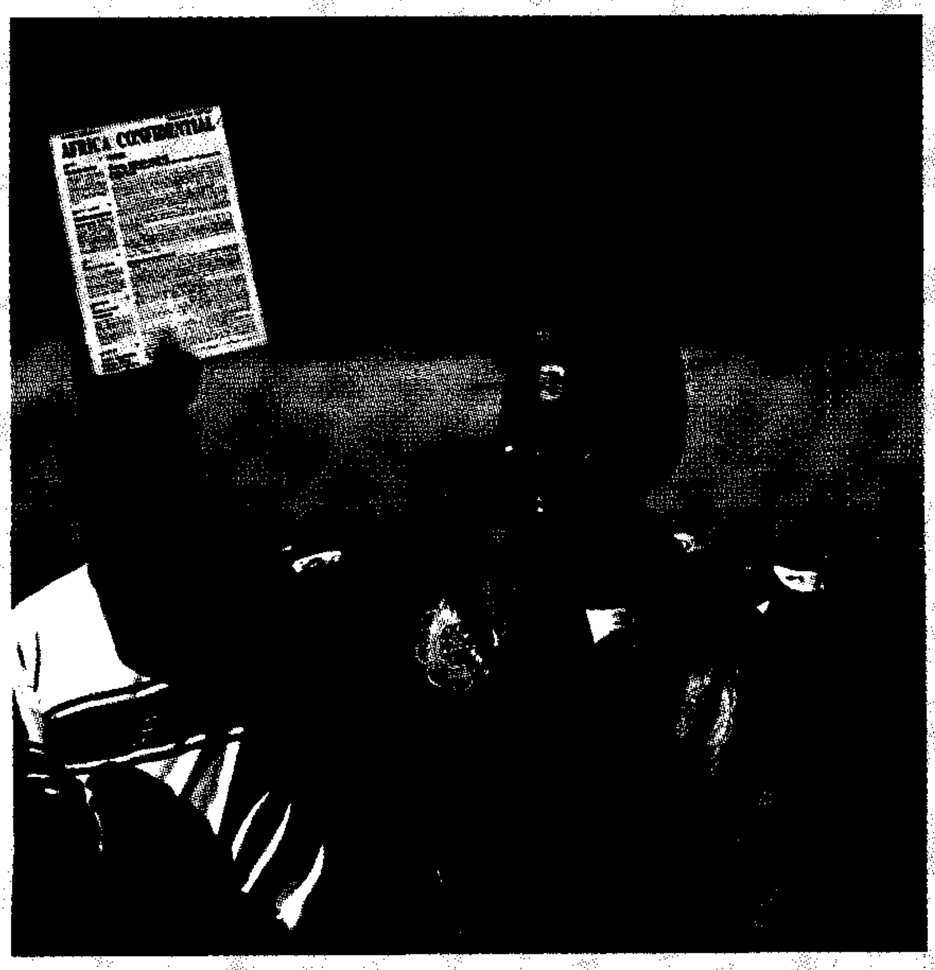

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What links US Vice-President Dick Cheney to a corruption probe into a US$10 billion gas plant in Nigeria?

Which leading supplier of military equipment to Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe dined at 10 Downing Street and has indefinite leave to remain in Britain?

Why is Britain planning to train Sudanese government spies after a UN Security Council report called for their prosecution for war crimes?

Which Saudi Arabian businessman hired Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners and sued Africa Confidential in 1995, then in 2001 was accused by the US of financing Al Qaida and had his assets frozen?

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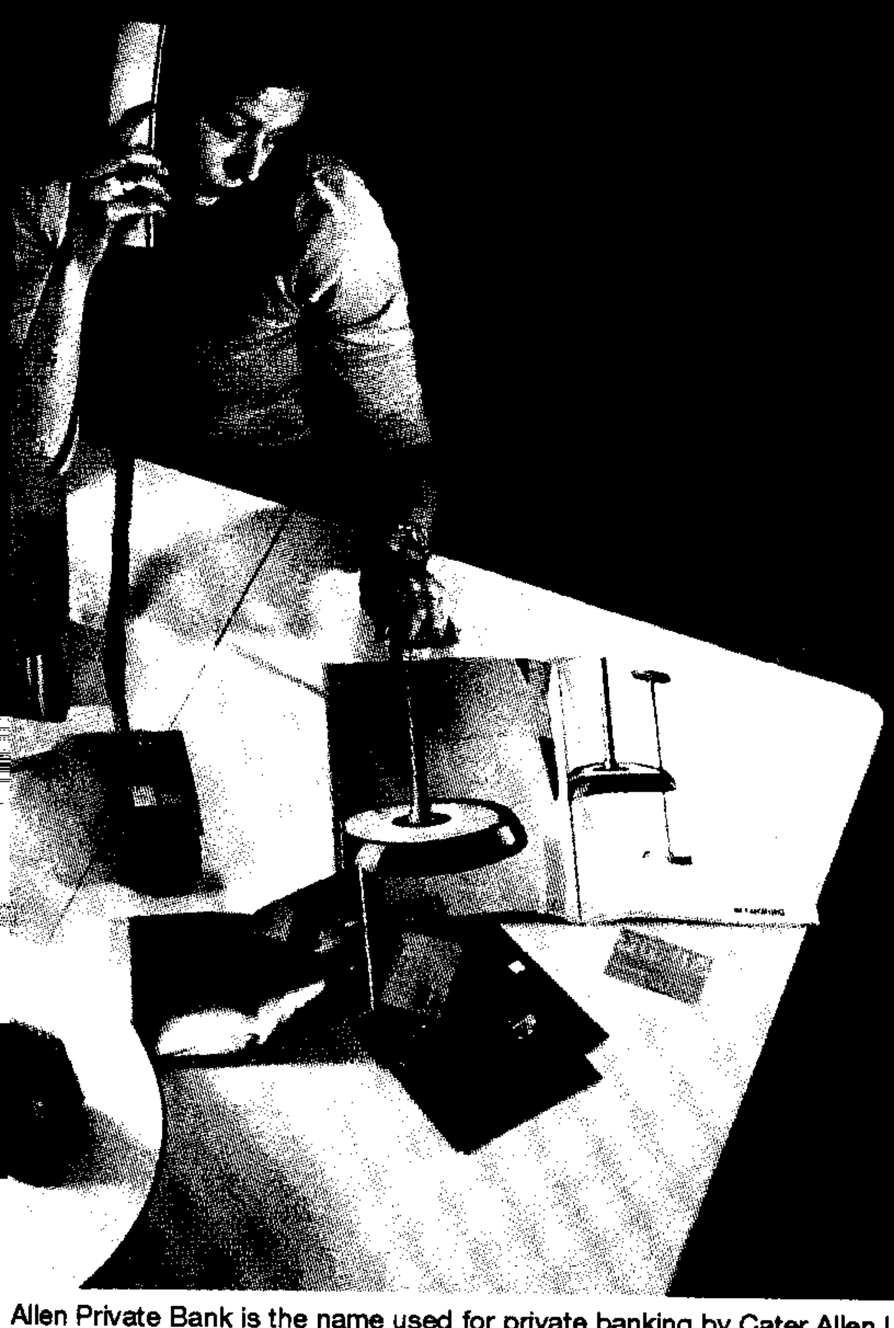

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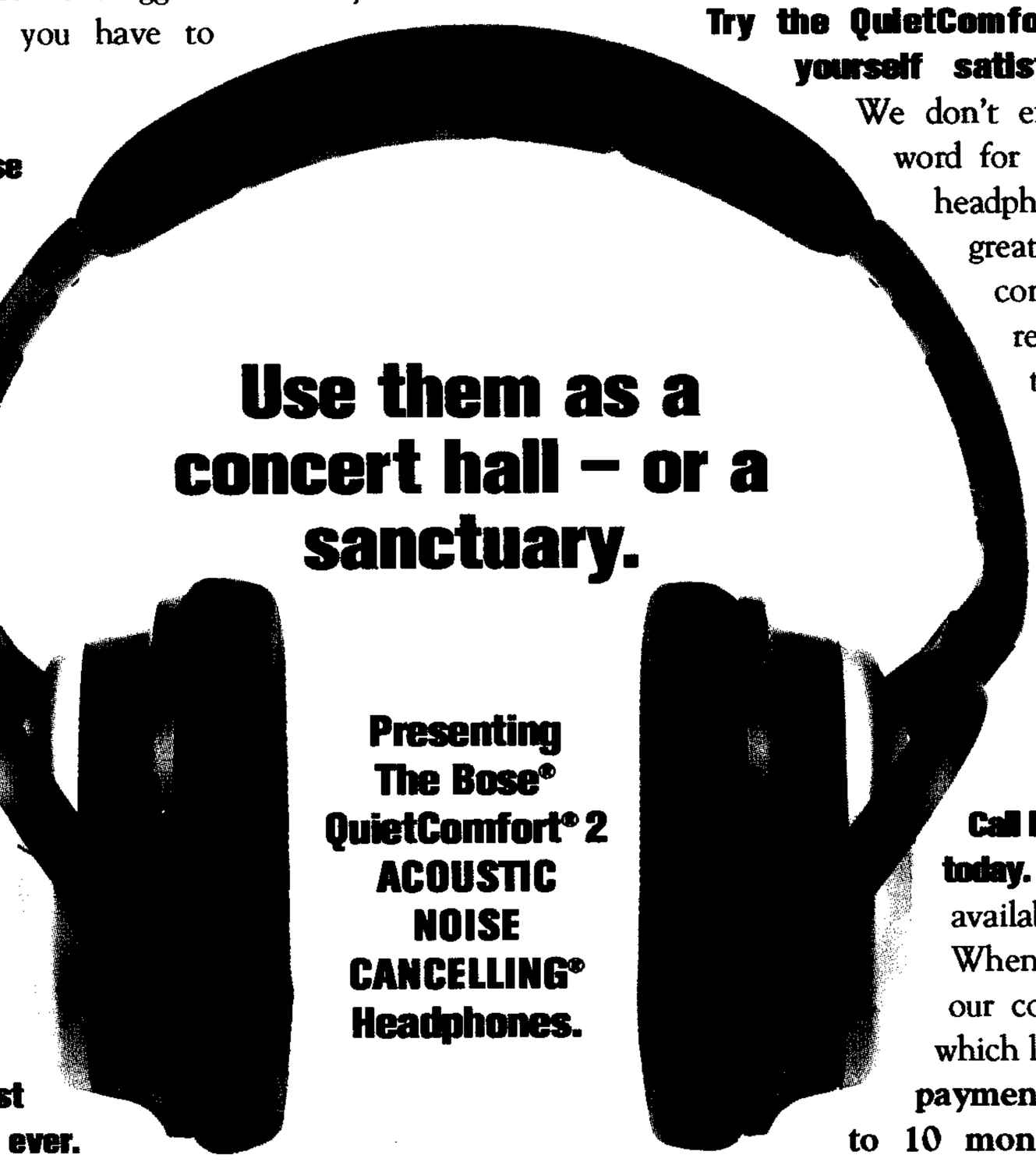

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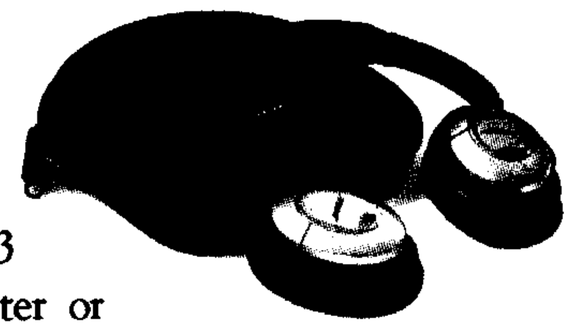

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